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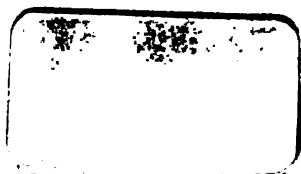


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He that eateth bread with me

H A Mitchell Keays

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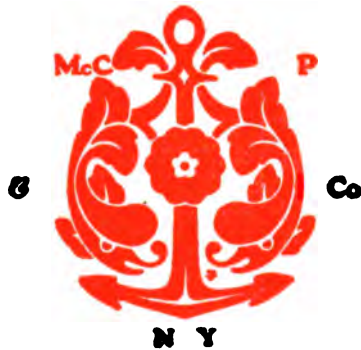


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BREAD WITH ME

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BY

H. A. MITCHELL KEAYS



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KE 3313



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HE THAT EATETH
BREAD WITH ME

CHAPTER I

AS he passed the florist's Mackemer paused a moment, and then went in. The thought occurred to him that he would take a handful of flowers to Katharine. It was a curious impulse at such a time, and he found himself impressed by the sentiment which inspired it.

It was long since he had given her a flower.

He selected the fragrant beauties with even more than his accustomed care, but when the dealer said, in a tone which denied the expectation of reply: "To the usual address, sir?" he stiffened, and remarked coldly: "I wish to take them with me."

He had asked for white roses, for this offering to Katharine, love's last sacrifice upon a cold altar, should be, to please his poetic fancy, an emblem of herself.

But when he glanced at the lovely blooms in their narrow box he shivered.

"That won't do," he said, sharply. "They look like a funeral."

"How would you like this, sir?" asked the man, laying a single scarlet rose among the white ones. "But it's the only one I have—a beauty if ever there was one."

"That will do," said Mackemer. "It will do exactly."

The men with whom he had travelled back and forth to the city daily for the past eight years trooped into the train, noisy as boys escaped from school, but to-night they wearied him, and when at last "Glenedge" was called he was glad to find himself alone. But as he turned from the station into the long avenue which led to his home a child wheeled recklessly toward him on a lurching bicycle.

"Whit!" he exclaimed, with a throb of pain in his voice.

The boy dismounted with unexpected ease by the simple process of falling off, and walked for a sedate instant beside his father. "I had to stay in after school to-day," he said, in tones of injury.

"Did you? Why?"

"Well, papa, do *you* know what a quadruped is?" There was a plain invitation to the negative in the little voice. "Now, don't stop to think. Miss Wing says we must *never* think. We must just know things without thinking."

"What did you say it was?" asked Mackemer.

"I said it was an island in the sea, and it is, I know it is, papa, and Miss Wing was so mean, she said it was a thing with four legs, and I said tables and chairs, and then I had to stay in, and *are* quadrupeds cats anyway, and now just see me make a record!"

He dashed breathlessly at the bicycle and vanished up the road, a whirl of legs, arms, and wheels, and as the father's eye followed him, the boy's brief history outlined itself for the hundredth time upon his wistful heart.

He had been the child of ecstasy, of life's subtlest emotion, and he showed it in every line and curve of his lithe young figure; in every expression of his sweet frank face. He was the idol of his parents' hearts, and in turn he looked upon them as little less than god and goddess.

Mackemer's lip trembled.

When he reached home, there was no wife to greet his step, but he seemed used to that, and hurried upstairs alone, coming down presently, radiant with the peculiar freshness of a man of critical elegance in personal habit. He picked up the box lying on the hall-table, and went lightly into the library. His wife was leaning back in an easy chair, with her hand over her

eyes, perhaps to shade them from the glare of the grate fire. But she sat up instantly, and said in a tone which carried an accent of timidity: "Oh, you're home, Clifford. Aren't you a little late?"

"Yes, I daresay. See, I have brought you some roses," he added, with a difficult affectation of ease. Until then, it had not occurred to him that the moment might magnify itself into an occasion; he had been thinking of himself and his emotions, not of Katharine and hers. He had been fascinated by the poetical significance of this gift to her; he had overlooked its cruelty.

"Oh, how—I!" but her breath caught in her throat. She stood up, wavering; then took them from him. "Ah, the red one!" A hidden thorn was merciless, and a half sob escaped her.

"Did it hurt you?" asked Mackemer, in the voice which, to a woman, sank inevitably to a caress. Even the drudge who swept his office knew the note.

"No, no!" But their eyes met, hers questioning, fearing, then dulled with the old despair; his—blue, deep, inscrutable, but with that fatal trick of expressing so much more than they mean to the woman upon whom for the moment they may rest.

Katharine went away, and came back with a vase in which she arranged her roses. Mackemer watched her idly, and as she moved about the room, he seemed almost to feel the faint perfume which was as much a part of her as her smile. But that was just it—it was all so faint. He was tired of pastel tints—he wanted colour, flame, the glow of the red rose in his life.

Ah, and he had it! He drew a sharp breath, and forgot to think of Katharine.

At dinner the conversation fell mainly to Whitney, who was abundantly able to maintain it.

"If you caught a flame and froze it, papa, what would it do? And what are poets' licenses, and where do they get them? Teacher's always talking about that, but when I asked her was it like a dog-tag, she got mad. Oh, mamma, why won't this cherry juice stick to my bread-and-butter?"

"Because the butter is slippery, I suppose," said Katharine, abstractedly.

"Yes, but I'd like to know *why* the juice won't stick to the butter—the real reason why," he persisted, despondently.

"Because there is no affinity between it and the butter," said his father, ponderously. Mackemer had long ago discovered that the child,

like the negro, approves an explanation at which his understanding may gasp.

Whitney gave a deep sigh of satisfaction. "I see," he said, earnestly, and struggled with the refractory juice no more.

But Mackemer's eyes clouded. A frozen flame! It was the history of his life and Katharine's in a phrase.

"Aren't you going out this evening?" asked Katharine, as her husband settled himself with a cigar and an air of permanence in the library after dinner. She had not asked him such a question for months—he had given her no occasion, and now her surprise involuntarily forced an expression of itself from her.

"I have some work I can do here," he replied, briefly, but he picked up a casual book at his elbow, and was soon apparently absorbed in its contents. So she brought her work and the child came with his lessons; an angel passing high on swift wing, and looking down might have smiled as in benediction of a Holy Family.

"Seven times six forty-five! Oh, no, Whit!" said Mackemer, rashly allowing himself to be taken captive by Whitney's arithmetical woes.

"Oh, yes, it is, papa. I know it is. Miss Wing says so."

"But no, boy, it isn't. Think again. Seven times six!"

"Forty-five," repeated Whitney, with the air of a martyr dying at the stake for his faith.

Mackemer looked stern.

"Forty-two," he said, "and you learn that before you do another thing, so that you'll never forget it as long as you live."

"But it really isn't forty-two, papa." Whitney spoke with an effect of the politest tolerance for his father's error. "Oh, it might have been when you were a little boy, or where you lived, but it really isn't here."

Then Mackemer reasoned, but speedily discovered that the son of a lawyer may have ability quite equal to his father's in proving that a thing is not what it is, and it was only when seven dominoes were arranged in six rows, that Whitney with the gravest air of impartial judicature gave a decision in his father's favour.

"What do you call a he-emperor?" he asked, presently. "That's in our lit-tra-ture lesson."

"But what is lit-tra-chewer, anyway?" asked Mackemer, chaffing.

"I don't know," answered Whitney, calmly. "We don't have to."

His chatter was insistent, disturbing, but when at last he had kissed his father and mother

good-night, and they had listened with beating hearts to the reluctant tread of his young feet over the stairs, and to the muffled sounds from the room above—the thud of a ball falling to the floor from hands never too tired to play—then a few slumber-inducing somersaults, and a last high, lingering good-night, a chill fell upon the room in which they were left alone.

Mackemer was clearly no longer reading, and Katharine's work was held by an unheeding hand; she began to study him with an intensity which absorbed her like pain. What was he thinking of? There in the silence, again and again, she asked that terrible question, until it seemed to her as if the violence of her unuttered demand must force from him at last some audible answer.

Was he thinking of her, with that faint smile upon his lip? Unconsciously the soft curve of her own assumed a bitter line.

Ah, there had been a time when sitting there alone together— No, she defied herself to remember!

But her eyes could not tear themselves from his face. What a boyish, tremulous mouth it was, but the lips spoke love's language in a way that claimed memory forever in the heart of the woman to whom they had once laid siege. And

his eyes—deep, blue, wavering; half smiling now, had owned her once, and her mind grew faint with pain as she remembered all that his look had lost for her.

But why had he brought her the roses to-night? That must mean something. Then why did he not say so? But what could he say? Was it not enough that he had brought them at all?

The warm tide of returning hope flushed her pallid veins. Ah, she would ask nothing of him, nothing, if he would but come back to her, to her alone. She had suffered so cruelly, not only humiliation, but the death of youth and faith in her heart, yet she banished remembrance of that when she looked at the flowers and then at him. Was he perhaps waiting now for some sign from her? She grew cold with the agony of struggle—the longing to approach him battling with her horror of the gulf which yawned between them—that gulf which no frail spray of roses could bridge.

And yet?

It grew late; Mackemer closed his book sharply. In another moment he would be gone, and she would have let her chance for reconciliation freeze on her coward lips. She would speak, she must—yes, if she could only still

the wild beat of her heart for one supreme moment.

"Clifford!" To her terrified ears her voice sounded like the whisper of a spirit long smothered in forgotten dust; she laid her hand on the back of his chair with an unconsciously pathetic feeling that he must help her—he, Clifford, always so sympathetic, so tender over the smallest thing alive in pain. "Clifford, you *do* love me?" Why of all questions did that one slip uncalled from her lips? She could have screamed with fear of it. "Clifford, Clifford, don't you love me?" There it was again, the eternal clamour of her heart voicing itself to him in hideous defiance of her delicate reserve.

Mackemer turned slowly in his chair as if to look at her, but his eyes remained far away in the glowing depths of the fire. For there, enhaloed by the red splendour of the flame, he saw a face.

"Clifford!"

Still he paused, but at last he looked full at her, and in that strange cruel moment of contrast his whole soul flashed into fire.

"Love you!" he echoed. "No, before God I don't, Katharine, and I'm sorry for it, but I don't, and there's no use lying."

The moment from which he had shrunk for

months had come; it was already in its shroud. An instant buoyancy expanded his heart; from golden stores of emotion his brain ripened thoughts hitherto under ban faster than his lagging sense could harvest them, for from every beacon of the future there flared to him now the signal, "Isabel, Isabel!"

But he found himself alone with his thoughts, for as he finished speaking Katharine turned from him; then quietly, unhurriedly, lifting the vase of roses from the table, she tossed it into the red death of the fire, and without a word passed from the room.

The glowing coals fell together with a crash; where his fancy had but now pictured the enchantment of that face there was left but the fierce struggle of one forked flame with another.

He watched the roses as the ravaging fire destroyed their loveliness with a sense of resentment which even now struck him as childish, but presently his eyes narrowed and his sensitive lips hardened, for once more he began to review his marriage and to consider his wife's character with a minuteness that left no lack in her unscathed. It never occurred to him that he saw her through eyes which had ceased to be his own. Few men, he argued, would have been just enough to sympathise as frankly as he did with

the misfortune of her position; few men in his position would have conceded as generously as he did her indisputably admirable qualities. Poor Katharine, it was hard on her! But at least he was a rich man, and it was a satisfaction to think that she need suffer no descent from her present style of living. That meant so much to a woman, though Katharine was peculiar, by no means an easy type of her sex. Lord, how tired he was of ideals! He and she had married on them, and she had kept it up ever since.

Whitney? Had he been forgetting Whitney? No, the thought of him lay like a mist of pain upon the background of his thoughts day and night, sleeping and waking, in the court-room and out of it, beyond the magic even of Isabel's haunting eyes to dispel.

But of course Katharine would have Whitney. He could not resist the feeling that in leaving her own child to her he was giving her something, yet lawyer that he was he knew well that he had forfeited all shadow of right to the boy.

His eyes clouded, but he was not going to fight that battle again. He had suffered enough, God knew, but the thing was done at last, and the future was his and Isabel's. Oh, he would keep his hold on Whitney somehow!

Poor Katharine! She was upstairs breaking

her heart, he supposed. He hated a woman to suffer; he would have liked to go up and comfort her, but what the devil could he say? It was an ugly business, look at it any way you liked, but it had just happened to him as it had to lots of other men. Poor Katharine! He lit a consolatory cigar—he felt in deplorable need of sympathy.

Katharine reached her room conscious of nothing save the terrible calmness of her heart; she sat down quietly and it was perhaps an hour before she stirred.

Then she began to sob, terrible tearless sobs, the heart's cruellest convulsion, until the fear seized her that she would scream; it seemed as if the whole universe must be waiting for her cry.

This, then, was the end of that insidious sun-dering, link by link, of the bond whose forging had filled her girlish heart with ecstasy, with that joy of whose perfection she had felt at times the deadliest fear? How could it happen to her, this horror?—to her who had drunk to intoxication of the rapture that comes to the woman who knows herself adored, and who has learned to place a magnificent valuation upon herself because the love of her beloved has throned her supreme?

She lost herself for a time in a whirlwind of remembrance. Husband and wife—how could that most sacred relationship, beside which all others paled of significance, be subject to decay, and at last to annihilation? Was its sacredness a sham—a mere legal and religious cloak for license—the safest expedient man had yet been able to devise for himself against himself? Was it but the means by which the race renewed itself, goaded to self-perpetuation by some tyrant force that demanded ever fresh food for death? Love? Her tender face grew scornful, bitter. That was all, then, that her marriage had been—was it?

She sat quite still again through long torturing moments until the blood fluttered wildly back to her white cheeks. Marriage nothing more than that? No, no! The hungered ideals of the woman heart, somehow attained, somehow adhered to through endless generations of despair and dishonour, arose and battled even now in this hour of shame and defeat for supremacy in her soul.

“Oh, Clifford, Clifford!” she moaned, “how could you forget this—and that?” she ran rapidly through a score of memories at any other time too intimate, too fragile in their delicacy to bear even the faint breath of retrospect.

Wherein had she failed? Was there still in marriage something that she had not yet grasped? Her heart protested No! and the hot fire of revolt burned suddenly in her face, as the consciousness of what had been the dignity and beauty of her affection for her husband swept over her anew. She had given him all that a man might ask, and if he had divined that behind the veil there was a holy of holies into which she had never bidden him enter, he should but have loved her the more for that.

Was it only evil women that all men instinctively understood? But she fought that question away from her in bitter fear of its cruel significance, for these were thoughts that ran deep to abysses from which her white soul shrank affrighted.

Marriage, motherhood—her lip curled again in scorn. After all, what did it amount to from the other side? In certain moods men rose to heights sublime in contemplation of woman as wife and mother, and even reproached her in large phrase for her lack of ability to appreciate her high estate—and in the next breath dragged the image they had set up from its lofty pedestal and hurled it into hell. Motherhood! Her cheek glowed. There was no man living qualified to talk to the most degraded mother of her

duty, for in some dim corner of her sodden soul there gleamed the eternal light upon an altar before which he had never bent.

Ah, her child, her child! It was the supreme relation of love. Men and women married and adored, and death came and tore them apart, but love found birth anew in their hearts and other idols usurped the place of those forgotten under the grass green again with every spring. But the mother never forgot her child; death could but enshrine him eternally safe in the bosom of her remembrance; her love and his would never be dust beneath the sod.

She walked restlessly up and down the room—up and down, a crimson spot showing now on either cheek, for there was heaping itself up on her a hideous consciousness of that terrible pain she was trying to smother, even while her heart quivered in tender, pitiful sympathy as for another's hurt.

Clifford—not love her, and tell her so—not love her? She repeated the bare little phrase over and over again, as if she were trying to beat its meaning into some dull brain outside of herself. Why, of course he did not love her. She had known that for a long time. She threw her head back proudly. But what could be more—more unmanly—the word wrenched her heart

—than to tell her so? Did he think that after such an avowal things could go calmly on as they had been doing—that now, after this, she could preserve her difficult pose of unconsciousness? What did he mean? She moaned, for she knew that around that question there were grouped all those others that she could not, would not face.

Was marriage then—the keystone of all human relationship—the most violable of any? Could it be possible that he, her husband, meant to leave her? And what then?

It was past midnight—Mackemer, lingering before the dying fire, was startled when the door behind him swung open, and his wife came into the room. She paused in front of him, meeting his hesitant gaze with a flame of repudiation in eyes beneath which his own cowered. He waited, miserably expectant. Could it be that a woman like Katharine would stoop to a vulgar scene? But when she spoke her voice was still as waters beneath a sheet of ice.

“It is because of Mrs. Durance?”

He flushed deeply, but made no answer.

“Mrs. Durance?”

Her quiet insistence was resistlessly imperative; he nodded with a strong effort for an air of indifference.

"It is."

"She has a husband?"

"She has."

She swept his face with an indescribable look; he saw a bright red line mar her tender lip.

"Katharine, believe me, I am sorry enough, I——"

"Sorry!"

Why was she bent on forcing him to anger, when he wished to be so just, and when, as he had not even any desire to palliate his fault, it seemed to him she could well afford to be generous?

"And will you tell me what I am to understand by all this?"

It was impossible not to resent her tone.

"I shall be very glad to tell you. I have meant to do so for some time, but have waited hoping that some opportunity would occur that would make it as—as——"

"Agreeable?"

He looked at her for a moment and then said, bitterly: "I see you are determined to make this matter as odious as you can. I had counted on your good taste to spare us both. There is nothing in the least unusual in—in this, and there need be no fuss whatever if you will look at it

in a rational way. Yet I suppose that a—a—divorce will always seem to you, with your training——”

“Never mind me and my training,” interrupted Katharine, “but do you think that Whitney—my child, our child—will think a divorce—a divorce between his father and mother—a—a rational thing?”

Mackemer turned away from her. There it was again—the whole question always came back to Whitney, and he had no power to hide from himself the sense of disaster that the thought of his child entailed.

Katharine watched him for a moment in silence; then with a strange, inexplicable melting of the anger which a moment before had seemed as if it could burn out her life and his she found herself longing only to hold him true to her at any cost, to draw him back somehow from the edge of this awful abyss—to begin again with the cruel past forgiven, forgotten, behind them, with their love for the child as a bond between them strong enough to resist all break. She knew that she had suffered the greatest wrong that a woman who loves her husband can ever know. She knew that somewhere in God’s universe vengeance was stored up for her; but her longing

for it, her bitterness, slipped from her in this moment like its sheath from the opening beauty of some fair bud, to reveal in its loveliness to him if he would but see, what might well have broken his heart.

And he understood somewhat, for though she said nothing she stepped toward him, and laid her hand on the arm of his chair—her beautiful hand, for which alone, in their first sweet days of life together, he had so often and so ardently assured her he would have married her.

Ah, this was just what he had dreaded most! He could meet anger with dignity and bitterness with reproach, but the facile sympathy which disposed him to be the friend of any woman in distress rendered him acutely conscious of the pathos of his wife's appeal.

What was it he was planning? To wreck her life, and to separate himself irrevocably from the child whose existence had been the crowning joy of his own?

And for what?

Ah, for what indeed! For a moment his heart stood still, and then its pulses thundered in his ears, for there with Katharine beside him, dumb from the very stress of her demand for his honor, a terrible feeling swept over him that he had been close to disloyalty—disloyalty to Isabel!

His return to her was complete. Yet an infinite pity flooded his heart.

"Katharine, it's too late," he said, gently. "You see, now, there is—Isabel."

She threw herself back from him, for his unconsciously tender utterance of that name was far more final to her in its sundering power than any decree of a court would ever be; she sank with a moan into a chair, uncaring, unthinking, that he heard.

And he looked at her. Was that stricken woman Katharine? Why just then was he assailed by the forgotten memory of her as he had first seen her, in her sweet, serious girlhood, a radiant vision of life and colour, standing alone in the prow of a dingy Rhine steamer, stormed by the winds from which everyone else had fled—exultant in the scenery which her young eyes conquered, a modern Victory with no sculptor at hand to immortalize himself and her in the unconscious beauty of her pose.

His heart rebelled; why had life been so cruel to them both! Yet he turned away from her and left her alone as he had first seen her. But the years between had stolen from her the future and left her only the bitter past.

As he passed Whitney's door he hesitated, and then went in. Something in him demanded suf-

fering as its due, and as he stood by the side of his innocent sleeping child, the lacerating moments embalmed a tragedy in his life.

He realised that and exulted, strangely counting his suffering unto himself for righteousness.

CHAPTER II

KATHARINE did not see her husband again; early the next morning he went down town to his club—not to return. Her servants looked at her curiously, but she gave no sign of needing sympathy, and when later her pastor called to see her, anxious and uncertain about his duty, his remotely suggestive allusions to the troubles of life failed to elicit from her any reference to her own. As he had a strong preference for emotional women, her bearing perplexed him, impressed him indeed as unwomanly. It was irritating to be forced to discuss higher criticism with a sister suffering presumably from a broken heart.

"Do you read fiction?" she asked him, abruptly, when the conversation gaped perilously.

"Oh, yes, two novels a year, Mrs. Mackemer. I always make it a point to reread one of the older novelists—a Thackeray or Sir Walter—and then if I have time perhaps a novel of the day."

"Ah, fiction ancient and modern," murmured Katharine.

"Yes, but I have no opinion of modern fiction. It is poor stuff, machine-made, like everything else in our day."

"Yes? Did you read 'Resurrection'?"

"No. I understood it was a very unpleasant book."

"Yes," she answered, "I should enjoy lending it to you."

He looked sharply at her.

"I should think," she went on, "that as you prefer remoter fiction, you would enjoy Balzac."

"Balzac!" he exclaimed. "I have always looked upon Balzac and Victor Hugo as essentially immoral writers, French to the core in the most vicious meaning of the word."

"Oh, if you look at it that way," retorted Katharine, "I should say that Hugo was a hymn-book compared to Balzac. But don't you think you would like Balzac if you read him with the difference between the Puritan and the Gallic mind steadily in view? Why don't you try 'Louis Lambert,' with Lathrop's introduction? I think you would find it quite helpful—in getting up a sermon, for instance."

"Your estimate of Balzac surprises me," he said. Katharine smiled imperceptibly. "I had

always considered him a poor imitation on the French plan of Sir Walter Scott."

"Of Scott? How could you? Scott pins a pasteboard heart on his character and sets it pacing and pirouetting on a tricked-out stage; Balzac digs in the living heart and shows us what he finds."

"Ah, perhaps," he said, vaguely, and went away with a feeling of resentment. How could he offer up the prayer he had composed on the way to the house with a woman who discussed French fiction, and who permitted him no initiative? This was clearly not the type of wife to hold a man back from straying in the paths of unrighteousness. It was evident to him that there was something to be said for Mackemer.

Weeks went by; the anniversary of Katharine's wedding-day drew near, and in retrospective agony she saw herself a girl again, trembling on the brink of life's greatest change; then a bride sweeping softly up the little country church aisle in the white shimmer over which a woman's heart grows tender ever after, with eyes only for her lover's as he waited for her. She saw nothing, thought of nothing, but only him, yet she remembered strangely afterward the quiver in the old minister's voice as he prayed above their bowed heads "that if the storm-

clouds ever hide the sun at noon-day from the sight of these Thy children, Thou wilt reveal Thyself to them as the Sun of Righteousness with healing in Thy wings." "Until death us do part." Ah, in her girlish bliss she had rejected all limit. Death? Her love defied it.

She unlocked her love-letters and sat with them before her for hours, motionless. Then she drew one out at random and read it to the end, and as she read there came to her the saddest thoughts she had ever known. For these were the things which her husband was now saying to another woman?

Her maiden bloom had lingered late, for marriage had been to her a sacrament, but in her misery she had already travelled far from the thought that it bore any semblance of that to either Church or State, for, with the indignation of despair she reflected that Law itself would render it easy for her husband to break every vow he had made to her. That, the only agency which at this frightful crisis of their lives had power to enforce allegiance to her upon him, was precisely the power which would abet him in deserting her, and then glibly legalise a new bond. And as for the church, did she not remember with contempt for its attitude the scandals which from time to time had been sanctified within its

precincts? An unholy divorce was no bar to its sacraments; she knew that while there might exist ministers who would refuse to marry her husband to another woman, there would be no difficulty whatever in finding obsequious substitutes for so rare a man of God. She thought with a strange expression upon her tender face of the spectacle presented by this vast organisation stertorously debating in solemn conclave whether the church had lost its hold upon the world, and ever making to itself reply with the repose of superior spirituality, that it still preached the gospel once delivered to the saints, but that the stuff for the making of fresh saints was no more to be found in a world which had lost its hold upon the church.

It was not her answer. Deep in her heart she filed a terrible indictment against the church. As long as its honour could be bought and sold for a fee, so long would the world pass it by on the other side with a sneer.

She resented the expectation of her confidence by a man like her pastor, but the assumption of priestly privilege was strong even in a professedly Puritan church, and as he practically carried his confessional trap with him wherever he called, he felt justly injured when one refused to enter and strip the heart bare. She had forfeited his

sympathy, but she could not forget that only a year before he had married an innocent girl to a notorious but gilded divorcé with all the pomp and benediction at his disposal. His congregation had murmured, but he conducted his defence so adroitly that the committee appointed to rebuke joined forces with him, and calmed the tumult by dwelling upon the spiritually reassuring fact that the ecclesiastical finances had never been in so flourishing a condition before. The dollar conquered in the house of God. How dared a man like that expect her confidence? Yet he had, and her face grew hard as she reflected how suavely he would have applied Scripture to her sorrows, treating this and that text like so much spiritual sticking-plaster, ready to clap on any raw wound of the soul.

Occasionally she was conscious of a feeling of horror at the mental upheaval which was indicated by the harbouring of such thoughts and criticisms as these. Until a year before her life had slipped along like a sunny stream between fair meadows, with no storm-cloud rush of nearing tempest to fret its placid flow, but now the hurricane raged in her heart in all its devastating fury, sweeping faith and illusion alike toward the anguish of destruction.

It was with a bitter appreciation of her men-

tal attitude that she one day found herself asking what sort of woman was this finally to be, who was losing her belief in everything good and beautiful in life—ah, everything except Whitney! Why not Whitney, too? How dare she expect the child of his father to be secure from the sin which had so disastrously cankered her life?

Her heart rose in rebellion against her, and when he came in from school she devoured him with eyes which sought passionately the purity and sweetness of childhood. And never before had she discerned so much of it. She looked up from the black abyss into which she had fallen, and there above it stood the child, serene in unsullied innocence, a pledge to her that life should never lose its promise and its joy. The miracle of childhood gripped her heart anew—that upon this sin-ridden, time-weary earth there should dawn this eternally angelic mystery of infancy! It was the race ceaselessly given back to itself, redeemed with a patience that somewhere knew no limit. And was she of all others to assume the taint of sin upon the fair soul of her boy? No! She would defy his heritage of it to drag him down. If redemption were a delusion the world would long since have been crushed out of existence by the accumulated weight of its crimes.

In time the child must know, and he and she would work together for the upbuilding of his life in righteousness.

But day and night, apart from her own bitterness in it, the father's sin lay heavy upon her heart. Who could tell unto what outermost edge of human destiny the consequences of it would spread?

It was spring-time once more, with April rains and pools far too alluring for Whitney to resist, with the result that he brought in from his play one evening the appalling sound of a croupy cough to harass his mother through a long night which she thought would never end. In the morning she telephoned for the doctor, who came at once, and assured her that she had done all that was necessary, and that she need anticipate nothing serious.

"You are sure?" she persisted, nervously. She felt so strangely alone; Mackemer had been a tower of strength to her in Whitney's illnesses.

"Quite sure," he answered, calmly, and then sat for a few minutes longer, talking on casual topics and joking with the boy, but from time to time his eyes rested sharply on Katharine's face. "It's the boy's mother I'm worrying about," he said at last, with an air of taking her into his frankest confidence.

"Me?" She straightened herself defiantly; the blood surged into her white cheeks.

"Yes. Don't you think it would be wise to care a little—for the boy's sake?" he ventured, slowly.

Katharine said nothing.

"I will leave you this. I wish you to take it." He spoke with more than a touch of peremptoriness. Clearly he was a young man who exacted obedience, yet he left with her the impression that he had been kind. And this touched her so that she had hardly shut the door after him when she felt the tears coming, and she was so afraid of that, for the shedding of a tear was a veritable illness to her. But they came now with the violence of a flood that had too long been dammed, and though Whitney called and called for her in astonished tone at her neglect, she could no longer deny to herself this terrible luxury of pain.

When Dr. Regester saw her again she impressed him as having been through some fresh crisis, because she was so calm, for he had more than a merely anatomical knowledge of the species to which he belonged, and he detected her resolute control to be but the perilous crust of a seething volcano. He had acquired a trick not taught in the schools of looking behind his

diagnosis of a disease for the emotion in which perhaps it had sometime germinated, a trick which was full of promise for his future as a physician.

Yet much as Katharine's story interested him, when the summer came and she went away, save for a vagrant thought now and then he forgot her problems in speculating upon others, for the lives of some of his patients were as full of them as a professional chess-board, until one morning in the late autumn, as he skimmed his paper, his eye was caught by the announcement of the granting of a divorce to Clifford Mackemer from his wife Katharine on the ground of desertion. He waited expectantly, and a week or two later he saw that Isabel Durance had obtained freedom from her husband in some God-forsaken fever-hole in Arkansas.

He had always rather liked Mackemer, yet here was the fellow acting like the rankest kind of a fool with a good deal of the villain thrown in. It was a pitiful waste of a man.

He watched now for the announcement of a marriage; it followed in due time, copied from a San Francisco paper.

Hitherto Regester's ideas of divorce had been extremely tolerant; it had often seemed to him that the unusual people who were happily mar-

ried assumed too complacently by far their unquestioned adequacy of ability to legislate for those who were not, while as a matter of fact it had always struck him as peculiarly manifest that only those who knew of the inner misery of their condition were fitted to deal intelligently with the mode of its alleviation. Undoubtedly the home was the corner-stone of society, but not the unrighteous home, in which perhaps children came into being not through love, but in spite of the lack of it. Stored away in his mind were some bitter instances of that—dark blots upon the short-sighted wisdom of a society that ignored the spirit of morality in a pharisaical zeal for the preservation of its dead letter.

But now with that marriage notice staring at him from the paper, with Mrs. Mackemer's wistful face in his memory, he was conscious only of the fierceness of his protest against this crime. Nurtured in agnosticism, devoted to a profession which dissecting the body finds within it no trace of a soul, he yet became in an instant the austere impersonation of that Puritan idea at which he had so often railed. The ancient Sinaitic, "Thou shalt not!"—enduring evidence of a puny people's magnificent struggle after righteousness—rose hot in his heart; it was left for the law of his enlightened day to legalise so flagrant a crime as

this, and for the church "by the Rev. St. Omer Mabb" to consecrate it—the church with its blatant cry, "Repent ye, the kingdom of heaven is at hand," fatuously unconscious that it had become but the sepulchre in which the Christ had lain, but from which He had forever departed.

It was inevitable that legislation on such a subject as this should be attended by great difficulties, but it seemed to him beyond the reach of argument that if it had never been possible for Mackemer to be tempted by the thought of divorce he would have found Isabel Durance's charms far less captivating than they had proved, and that he would have remained in fact a quite devoted husband and father. But the divorce-made-easy system had stealthily undermined the man's moral nature until he was completely blinded to the enormity of the crime which the law permitted him to commit. It seemed to Regester a sickening spectacle—this wanton wrecking of a home to which its former dignity and affection might have been ultimately assured.

It was a few days before Christmas when he finally heard of Mrs. Mackemer's return to Glenedge, yet though he passed the house continually it was some time before he could make up his mind to go in.

"I knew you were at home," he said, simply,

"and as you are my patients I felt that I should like you to know that I was glad of it."

"How very subtle!" Katharine smiled. "But the outlook for you is gloomy. Whitney and I are well and intend to remain so."

"You think, then, that you are well?"

"Oh, quite as well as I need to be for all the practical purposes of life," she answered, still resolutely smiling. Her wistful eyes met his for a moment; her lips quivered slightly, and in an intuitive flash he realised that then and there she was on the verge of a break-down. But at all hazard she must be spared that. To a woman of weaker character it would have been a means of healing; to her it would be a catastrophe, for she could not break the law of her nature to suffer in silence with impunity.

"I have thought so much about you," he said, quietly. "You have had a great deal to bear. Were you personally acquainted with Mrs. Durance?"

The shock of the question operated exactly as he had desired, though he hated himself for the cruelty of it, just as when he wrapped a fever-burnt child in a freezing pack.

Katharine straightened herself instinctively; the quiver died on her lips, the mist cleared from her eyes.

"I am," she answered, with cold dignity. "Are you?"

He could have applauded her courage, but he merely remarked with apparent indifference: "Oh, yes; really rather well, I might say. I first met her two years ago in a curious way. It was a bitter winter afternoon, and I was down town. The home rush had already begun and right in front of me, on the corner of State and Washington, a little newsboy slipped on the icy crossing and went down under a carriage. The wheels passed over his leg and broke it. While I was gathering him up and finding out something of his injuries, a lady stepped out of the carriage and asked what was the matter. Of course there was a crowd at once, but how cool that woman was. 'Get into my carriage with him,' she said, 'and we'll drive to the Emergency Hospital.' I hesitated, for she was—well, what you know Mrs. Durance is, and he—oh, I think he was the dirtiest little object I ever laid a finger to. My hesitation displeased her. 'Get in, man, and don't stand staring like an owl,' she said, quite frankly, and I laughed. So did the crowd. Naturally after that I got in. Well, I met her several times after that in reference to the boy, and I tell you that slip was the luckiest step he ever took in his life. She has looked after him

since in the most entirely matter-of-fact manner, and the last time I saw her she told me that he was so smart she was sure he would some day be famous, but she was quite certain he would never be clean. It's the strangest thing—I don't think she's generous, I'm not even sure that she's kind-hearted, but she has what I might call a cynical sympathy with humanity that beats emotion hollow. Oh, come, I must go, and you must pardon me for speaking of Mrs. Durance. She has always interested me; a doctor has such chances for studying character, if he cares for that sort of thing. There's nothing so fascinating."

"And you like her?" asked Katharine in a remote voice.

"Like her! Ah!" he drew a long breath. "When I was a boy a snake had charms for me. I longed to kill it cruelly, brutally, to beat its head to a jelly, because it fascinated me so. I generally ran away. The ability to run at the right moment is a great gift, by no means as highly appreciated as it deserves to be."

A wintry smile crossed Katharine's face. "Yes," she said in a half-breath. She was thinking of Mackemer, and she understood that Register was entering an oblique plea for him; she felt confusedly grateful.

"She is a terrible woman," he added, suddenly, "a terrible woman. But what I cannot understand is how your husband *could* obtain a divorce."

He wondered how he could ask such a question, but all through his talk he had been watching her, and he had realised that she had reached a pass where she must talk to someone—or something would soon snap—and who better than himself?

She merely looked at him without replying, and he began to draw on his glove. Then, "If I got a divorce," he ventured, "I should want it to be as straight as that kind of thing could be."

"Ah, you think he got it by—by—" Katharine hesitated. "But he didn't. I went away. Don't you see?" Her voice wavered. "I wanted to get away where I should never see anyone I knew again. I told nobody where I was going, and so I put it into his power to affirm that he could not discover my address—that I had deserted him."

"But he could have found you—you know that."

She hesitated. Then she said, slowly, reluctantly: "He did. His lawyer notified me at once of the granting of the divorce."

"Oh, but surely you could have upset the

whole thing on the bare showing of such fraud as that."

"I could have. But I had no desire to."

"Well, I think you're right about that," said Regester, heartily. "But not every one would be as wise."

She looked at him steadily. "Perhaps you don't altogether understand me. You think that I accept it all, and that I intend now to live my own life without further heed to my husband. Oh, no!" She drew herself up. "I accept nothing. I deny that divorce. Clifford is still my husband. No law can alter that fact. Law cannot one day make him mine until death, and the next day give what is mine to another until death. When it does that it becomes a mere travesty of right and justice. He is still mine, and do you know what I think?"—he was struck by the sudden loveliness of her face, the tenderness of her mouth, the illuminated deeps of her dark, steadfast eyes—"I think that perhaps there have been moments since he left me when he has been nearer to me than ever before."

Regester could have smiled—or wept—at her innocence.

"Oh, don't think such things for a moment," he exclaimed, impetuously. "You are laying up untold misery for yourself." The thought

flashed through his mind that if Mackemer had married Isabel Durance in the first place, he would probably never have experienced any temptation to be unfaithful to her. But he had married this woman—the noblest type, and the result! The whole thing had been hopelessly awry, and in the straightening someone had to suffer; this poor bruised woman must learn to face her fate without equivocation.

“But I shall think nothing else,” answered Katharine, quietly. “Day and night, night and day, I shall call to him, and some day he will hear me and listen.”

He recalled the magnificence of Mrs. Durance's endowment with all that makes for peril to the strongest man, and as he looked at Katharine he shook his head. “Besides,” he added, in continuation of unspoken thought, “there is something else. Have you never thought of it?” He stared at her, conscious of an odd feeling of displeasure; there was something lacking in a woman who could speak as she did. “You are overlooking a serious point. No woman of spirit would ever be willing to receive again a man who had done her so terrible a wrong as this. Her pride would mercifully protect her from that. You have suffered a great deal, and it is quite natural that you should thrash these things

over and over in your mind until you become confused, but in time you will see this whole matter very clearly. Forgiveness is a pretty virtue, but not intended for indiscriminate application. There are cases where it is distinctly out of place. This is one."

She sat with her face averted from him, looking through the window down the bare wintry road with its dreary lines of silent, untenanted trees; it seemed almost as if she were watching for some one; there was a remembrance of youth and hope in her attitude. But as he finished speaking she turned upon him with brilliant eyes, and when she spoke there was a passion in her voice for which he was unprepared.

"So that is your idea of marriage. It is not mine. You would set limits to the endurance of its pledges. I know none."

"Oh, you are outrageously wrong," he exclaimed, arbitrarily. "You must be a brave woman and not look at life falsely, and whatever you do keep yourself sane. You can. And you have Whitney. You must forget everything else."

A tempest of colour swept her face; there was no surrender in her flashing eyes. "I shall forget nothing," she said, resolutely.

And as he looked at her, contemptuous of her folly, he realised that in these past few months

there had come to her something that she had not possessed before, yet his quick appreciation of this but added to his exasperation.

"Your husband belongs now to the woman to whom Church and State have given him," he said, brusquely. "Don't you understand that it is imperative that he should cease to be part and parcel of your life—of your thought?"

"No, I do not, and I wish you could see that your idea of marriage is exactly the same as my own, if you would only admit what you really believe. Clifford has broken his vows to me, but I have not broken mine to him, and so my marriage to him remains intact. No, you must not argue with me, please. I have—suffered, and I can only find peace—like this. Yet I am not deceiving myself for the mere sake of getting it, for you know as well as I do that in our hearts we all believe in the inviolability of marriage. You do, I do, the labouring man does, and the working girl. Then if marriage is what in our hearts we admit it to be, it must be strong enough to bear every wrench, to endure all things, to hope all things, if we will only trust our ideal of it. It is not for just the joy of to-day or to-morrow. If our conception of it is noble we will accept sorrow, we will bear without murmur even—even——"

Her voice died away, but she still faced him with eyes that permitted themselves no flinching.

It seemed to Regester that he would remember their expression forever; he sat quite still for a moment, looking at her, thinking of her, strange woman that she was, his square resolute jaw taking on a yet grimmer outline. Then he rose to go, and held out his hand to her in silence.

But the tears stood suddenly in her eyes, for she realised with an acute sensitiveness that she had revealed to him the innermost movements of her life and thought, with a strange lack of the reserve so integral a part of her; yet having done so, she longed for sympathy, for understanding, for excuse.

"You think perhaps that I—I——?"

"I'll tell you what I think," he said, almost coldly, his steady gray eyes freighted with a strange expression, "I think your loyalty to your ideal of marriage is enough to break a man's heart."

At the gate he paused and looked back at the lonely house, standing bleak upon the December snow. But the loneliness without was as nothing to that within. The pathos and the hopelessness of it all weighed heavily upon him.

CHAPTER III

IN the year and more that Katharine had been separated from her husband she had wandered into many blind alleys of human thought; she stumbled at last into one that boldly proclaimed itself the high-road to peace. Yet she still travelled the foot-worn way to salvation with Whitney each Sunday, because she felt that in the child must be re-enacted the development of the race, and that only for himself could he in time discover the faith that should lead him out of the artificial into the real. But for herself, she became the disciple of a faith new to her, of a salvation by wisdom, which preached itself to her in calmest accent, declaring that unless there came to her "more simpleness, loftier faith, wider range, then had she been deceived in vain, and might truly say, Nothing has happened."

It was easy to perceive that she believed thus, but it took courage to face all that would be implied by the carrying into practice of the precepts of so sublimely serene a philosophy. To forgive

all that she had suffered—to forgive him and—her, now!

But at last, through long nights and weary days, she acquainted herself with the grief of forgiveness, until her heart grew familiar with it, then acquiescent, and finally, nobly submissive. Not that she ceased to suffer, but she no longer craved retribution; would not the only lasting injustice which could be inflicted upon her consist in her own denial of that which was noblest in herself?

The first faint green of the spring had fallen like a mist from fairy-land upon tree-top and turf when she and Whitney went out once more to plant the flower-bed which was his peculiar property with the seeds which never bloomed, save in his fertile imagination, for various, most adequate reasons. She sat down at last, tired from the unusual labour, and closed her eyes to everything but the inner vision, glorified to her by the incense of the fragrant frost-free air. Her heart overflowed with sudden rapture in this new green world of life and hope. What made it so fair? Not anger and hate and the longing for revenge. Here in the sweet spring sunshine, with the caressing note of nest-building bird above her, and the chalice perfume of tender bud breathed prodigal upon the dreamy

air, there seemed to descend from the eternal throne above the passing blue of life's brief skies the premonition of a judgment, not upon her, but upon them who had driven her forth from the Eden which was her right. She trembled with fear—for them. The spring would come again in all its beauty; perhaps she would sit there another year to welcome it, but there would dawn at last a day when her place would know her no more, when the life-lease of her human tenement would have expired, and all that she would have to leave behind her then would be a memory that should bless or curse.

The shadows lengthened, the love-notes of the birds grew faint and fainter, the light chill of evening veiled the sweetness of bud and blade, the sunset glory of vision faded, but not the high resolve of which the golden moment had been the annunciative herald.

Yet for a few days she waited, uncertain of her course, but determined as to her purpose. Then something beyond herself seemed to say: "You will go to-morrow," and at once she began to prepare for what lay before her.

"But where are we going, Mother?" asked Whitney the next afternoon, in great amazement at being kept out of school. "I suppose to get my picture taken." Nothing else served to ex-

plain to him his mother's passionate interest in his appearance.

Why must she take the child with her? Ah, because he was warm and human and her own, and the sight of him would give her the strength that she might otherwise lack. And he should hear nothing that his childish memory could preserve to be a grief to him in days to come. No, she could not go without him; her loneliness would be greater than she could bear.

A funeral procession wound its mournful way past the house; looking out she saw it, and burst suddenly into tears.

"O Whit, Whit," she whispered, in an abandonment of pain that brooked no restraint, "do you see that? I wish it was mine, darling."

"Well, I don't," he declared, stoutly. "But I wish Papa would come home. Why doesn't he, Mother? The boys at school tease me so." He eyed her sharply, and she divined that he had concealed all kinds of troubles in his loyal desire to spare her.

"What do they say, darling?" she asked, quietly.

"Oh, nothing," he answered, with elaborate carelessness. "Boys are such—such—oh, but I punched 'em and they shut up."

"Tell me," she persisted.

He shook his head.

"Why, Mother, I couldn't tell a lady like you." She sighed at his diplomatic evasion of her questions. "But I just smashed their faces good and hard, and that's the end of that."

So even for the child there was to be no escape. As long as life lasted his father's sin would find the son out, and harass and perplex all that was noblest in his nature.

For a few moments she sat silent, watching the long black line of carriages in slow disappearance over the hill. After all, the final test of life must ever be death, but as she endured now, whether nobly or ignobly, in this brief moment which alone she knew to be hers, so would she be found in the last great retributive moment of Death.

Her soul grew strong again, and looking at Whitney with deep eyes, she repeated: "Whit, whatever is right can never be impossible; whatever is wrong can never be eternal."

He stared at her wondering. "I was afraid you were going to cry again," he said, confidentially. "And you mustn't, because you look lovely this afternoon. It's a new hat and a new dress, isn't it? Really, for such an old woman you look very young, Mother."

She laughed with the tears brimming her eyes

again; the abounding sweetness of life was still hers, with the child's hand in her own.

And then they set out. But she never afterward had memory of anything that intervened until they reached the place she was in search of. She crossed the crowded streets with no apprehension of their crush and clamour, for in a whole city of struggling, pushing people she was traversing alone a narrow path kept clear for her by a high power.

"Gee! That woman has nerve," exclaimed a man, as he saw her snatch a bewildered old lady from the jaws of a cable-car, and pilot her calmly across the seething street. Nerve! She would never again need it so desperately as in the brief hour before her after she had entered the Engaletcheff, and inquired with a flush that came in spite of countermand for "Mrs. Mackemer."

The elevator took her to the fifth floor. She wondered if the maid who answered her ring could hear the throbbing in her throat as she faintly repeated the question she had asked a moment before. She realised suddenly that she had taken a terrible task upon herself, and now that she was really there, in the home that had become her husband's, breathing the heavy-scented air that he breathed, looking at the things upon which his eyes daily rested, she felt an awful re-

moteness from him, yet in its bitterness she found strength. Her life was never more to touch his in the tender familiar daily round, but her spirit was henceforth to seek his, with a love that knew no fear, that shrank from no sorrow, that denied him no darkest depths from which he might grope upward to the light.

And yet, in a moment, as she sat in this room watching Whitney with dim eyes as he moved lightly about with a child's curiosity from window to window, she felt herself oppressed by a thick cloud of horror, of self-distrust, of lack of faith in her hardly won ideals. Her hands began to tremble; she could feel the impotent tears close under scorching lids without even the power to let them fall. And just then, a curtain behind her was swept imperiously aside, and Mrs. Mackemer stepped into the room.

She was very tall and carried herself with a confident demand for the right of way which was so invariably granted to her. The perfection of her colouring was that which allies itself only with the hair whose gold is tinged with red; it was the enchanting pink and white of a dimpled cherub. Her forehead was low and broad and smooth, without a line to compromise its whiteness, and beneath it gleamed the narrow hazel eyes which, once looked into, left a memory not

soon to be forgotten. The thin straight eyebrows were darker than her hair, and added strength to a face which lacked it nowhere, even in the mouth, that close scarlet line so often called sweet. Her firm chin curved slightly upward, giving her at times a charmingly piquant expression, but in that curve was expressed all the recklessness of her nature.

Her dress, always tempted by the extreme of style, was calculated to be a revelation to a woman whose elegance never escaped a certain nun-like severity, for she wore a house-gown of scarlet satin, brocaded with carnations of a barely lighter hue, their gay green stems making vivid colour contrast. There was no harmony whatever between the tint of her beautiful hair and that of her gown, but she had ignored that, and no man in his heart would have owned the effect unjustified.

And it was into the presence of this woman that Katharine had come, Katharine, white, quivering, fresh from the cross of renunciation, to offer pardon where none was asked, to give peace for a sword, to crucify herself once more, if in some mysterious way she might but serve to save what had been dearest to her on earth.

"Why, how perfectly charming this is of you, Mrs. Mackemer! I have never permitted my-

self the pleasure of expecting a call from you." Isabel laughed lightly. "Of course I'm not receiving just yet, though we dine at the Nordways to-night"—she felt it most desirable for Katharine to know that, the Nordways being old and valued friends of Mackemer—"but I find Clifford such a hopelessly domestic man. Did you?"

She had not meant to dare quite such a remark as that, but her visitor's silence and impenetrability provoked it from her.

"Whitney," said Katharine, in a voice that was very still, "run away, darling, out into the hall and wait for me."

"Ah, you have brought Whitney with you! I'm so glad. I hope to see him often. He's a lovely boy. I mean to be very fond of him."

Again she looked straight at Katharine, and laughed daringly. Ah, that voice! Would it vibrate forever after this on the tortured nerves of memory, thick and rich, a sleek human purr?

"Run away, darling," repeated Katharine, steadily.

"You'll find Ida somewhere," supplemented Isabel, "and ask her to show you the big green parrot. He'll call you awful names, but you won't mind that, will you? He's only a green parrot, you know."

And a moment later they heard his high clear laughter in the distance in strange duet with the grating screams of the enraged parrot.

Then, for what seemed an eternity of waiting, there was silence between the two women; at last Isabel leaned forward. "Would you mind telling me," she said, sweetly, "what you are here for anyway? I feel most curious to know."

There rushed over Katharine the memory of that other most terrible moment when, struggling to speak to her husband, she had at last succeeded and brought upon herself the greatest crisis in her life. But she pushed that memory away, and gripped to her heart again the simple words which had yet possessed a power mighty enough to bring her here this afternoon. "If you have been deceived, it is not the deception that matters, but the forgiveness whereto it gave birth in your soul."

And then she spoke, in a voice low and trembling, but persistent—pleading, yet imperative:

"You have done me the greatest wrong that one woman can ever do another, but I have come to tell you that I wish to forgive you, to think of you without bitterness." Isabel did not stir; her eyes just narrowed to a line. "Perhaps you can do for my husband what I could never do—per-

haps he needs you—perhaps he will learn through you what I could never—never——”

Isabel sprang to her feet, and burst into sharp laughter. “What is the matter with you? Are you a fool?” she asked. “And did you come here thinking that I was one, too?” A wild whirl of words eddied on the edge of her lips, but for a moment she waited, studying coldly where to strike. Never before in her passionate existence had she known an emotion stronger than what she called love, but she knew it now, and its name was hate. “You would forgive me, would you?” she said, slowly. “What for? Because you couldn’t keep your husband? Do you think that I would have let another woman take him from me had I been in your place? Do you think that you could have? *You!*” She ended with a low laugh, warm and sweet and cruel in her white throat.

But Katharine looked straight into her eyes. “You have not taken my husband from me. You never can. He may be yours legally—he never can be morally, and you know it. You will try to forget me and my little child—you will never forget us. Neither will he. There will come a time when looking at you he will think only of me, the wife——”

"Listen!" Isabel stepped toward her, with face white above her scarlet array. "He is mine, *mine*—so much mine that if I had to I would go to heaven for him, and snatch him from the right hand of God himself. Now, do you understand?"

The green parrot and Whitney had compared notes on many things by this time and had passed into the life-long friend stage; and when Whitney called at last: "So long, Poll, so long," the green parrot wept bitterly and refused to be comforted even with the cup of hot coffee he adored, and four lumps of sugar.

When Katharine reached home she went upstairs with the silence in which she had travelled back unbroken, her step impalpable as a wraith's; her face with the stillness of death upon it. But it was weeks before she came down again, and Dr. Regester wondered in vain what new experience had cost her so dear.

Long afterward, when she could bear to remember, she realised, with an infinite pity for herself, that the suffering which she had deemed stilled and controlled by high resolve had driven her in its unconscious intensity upon rocks which had nearly beaten her faint life from her. She had cried "Peace" where there was none, and

crying it had dared what in saner moment she would have known impossible.

But the green parrot, taking his morning cracker the next day from Mackemer, looked at him sharply, and called in harsh, disconsolate croak: "Whitney! Whitney!"

CHAPTER IV

KATHARINE had been living alone about two years when she one day received a letter from a cousin who, it seemed to her, ought really to be in long clothes, instead of being quite evidently a young woman with a mind of her own and very clear ideas as to things in general and men in particular.

"It's like this, Cousin Katharine," the girl wrote, "Mamma and Aunt Betha are simply making things insufferable for me because I won't get married. Now I put it to you—how could I marry John Cassius Dargey? I really wish you knew him. I have such confidence in your judgment, derived from my impressions of you when I was an infant at the nourishing end of a bottle. Just a glimpse of John Cassius turning the street corner would, I know, be quite sufficient to enable you to perceive the eternal unfitness of their frantic efforts to yoke self and John together in the holy bonds. Oh, they're not cruel to me. Don't imagine that. The dear

tabbies—they simply couldn't be. They're the sort who think spiders should be murdered with kindness and chloroform. But my inability to develop a marrying affection for J. C. has crushed them. They take no interest any more in the size of the washings on the line next door, and they don't give a dash whether they have new bonnets or not this winter. I've put them on tonics, and I just wish you could have heard Mr. Briggs laugh when I asked him for some medicine warranted to produce a desire for new table-linen in elderly female souls. If they'd only beat me I could bear it with bawls, but I simply cannot stand this everlasting drip of aged tears. It's so bad for their complexions.

"So I'm going away for a while. I mean I'm coming to stay with you. Is Thursday of next week too soon?

"P. S. They can't understand how any right-feeling girl can resist J. C.'s bank account. Neither can I. I weep to think it will never be mine. I could kill cockroaches to get it, but I could never, never, no, never, kiss John Cassius for it, and the men make quite a point of that, don't they?"

Katharine laughed over this letter as she had not laughed for many a day. A girl who wrote thus promised entertainment of an original sort,

and she sent at once a kind little note to Mrs. Casler, asking her to let Airlie come and stay with her for a time.

The return post brought an answer from Airlie. "Of course, I had never thought of your writing them, but to be sure that was the delicate thing to do, and they're tickled to death, quite willing to have me go, even unto that great and wicked city. In fact, I think they quite expect my presence there to exert a most purifying influence on it. And it occurred to me happily to suggest that I could send them bonnets. Bless my bones! The tonics retired to the top shelf, for they are sure now of that touch above the vulgar after which their chaste spirits yearn. All right. Be with you on Thursday."

Yet Katharine felt somewhat nervous as the day drew near. In the last two years her interests had shrunk into small compass; this irruption of an outside personality threatened the peaceful dulness of her uneventful shell.

But Airlie had not been in the house twenty-four hours before she had appropriated a place which it seemed must have been waiting always for her.

"How does my skirt hang?" she asked, five minutes after her arrival. "Blasphemously, doesn't it? Now, be honest, cousin dear. Of

course it does. But tell it not in Gath nor speak of it in Askelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines hear of it and rejoice. In this particular instance that means mother and Aunt Betha, for I had this garment made against their united wills, and when it came home, I—well, never mind—for the sake of the morals of youth”—she winked daintily at Whitney—“I will refrain from repeating my remarks, but the next morning, after a night of meditation and prayer, I descended upon the depraved woman who had fashioned it, and asked her with a going-to-die-young expression on my fair countenance whether she thought she could get me a good fit in sack-cloth and ashes, because if she could, I would order a suit and wear it all winter in preference to the other. But I never gave in to them, you know. I never do on principle. I always referred to the gown as the masterpiece, and they couldn't tell whether I didn't know it didn't fit, or whether I wouldn't know. There's nothing on earth quite so exasperating as innocence, when you don't know whether it's that or the other thing, is there? And they're so very literal. You'd think that living with me they'd get over that, but they never do. They only catch on about once in twenty-five times.”

“Do you always refer to them collectively as

a personal pronoun?" asked Katharine. Her eyes were bright with amusement.

"Always. With a capital T, if you please. I was quite a big child before I discovered in the most accidental way that I necessarily belonged to one of them rather more than to both. I can't possibly separate them in my thoughts. They do nothing independently. They can't. They spend days sometimes arguing whether they shall go out last Tuesday with their rubbers on or not. What I mean is that it's Tuesday morning when they start in to arrange to go out in the afternoon, but by the time they finally settle what to wear it's Friday or Saturday at least. The natural result of that is that if the weather has changed in the meantime and the sun is shining, you will see them nevertheless clothed to the neck in mackintoshes as thick as hides. Oh, everybody in Windwater loves them and sympathises with me. They're as weak as wax separately, but then they never are separate, and together!" —she whistled like a reckless boy—"well, together they're a team, let me tell you, and I'm completely worn out driving them."

Katharine laughed. The girl looked at her keenly. "Does it seem funny to you—the way I talk about them, I mean? Honest now."

"Oh, just a little."

Airlie's face fell. "I do love them, oh, a great deal, I suppose. But I think—oh, they *are* rather young for me, you know."

There was a little silence, which the girl broke at last in her restless way. "Oh, I was awfully afraid that it might be a jump from the frying-pan into the fire, you know—coming here, I mean. But"—she gave a deep, contented sigh—"it's lovely, and you—oh——"

Some quick expression in Katharine's face went to the girl's heart.

"Oh, naughty!" she exclaimed. "Mustn't look like that. You'll spoil your face."

"My face?" Katharine smiled, with a sigh.

"Yes, your face. It's the only one you'll ever have, isn't it? Well, then, be good to it."

"Now," said Katharine the next day, "things ought to be gay for you, my child, while you're here, and the question is, how is it to be done?"

"Gay for me!" exclaimed Airlie. "Oh, no, cousin mine, you quite mistake the character of the young person in your immediate neighbourhood if you imagine anything like that. Bless my heart! There's nothing frivolous about me. Why, just look at me! Haven't you discovered the mighty determination in my chin, and the ambition bumping out just where it ought to on my curly cranium. Why, I'm a perfect female

Napoleon. I haven't come here for fun. Not much. Though I'll have dead loads of it incidentally. I always do. But that's not the point. My dear, I'm one of the unfortunate people cursed with a gift—two gifts, perhaps, for I can sing and flirt equally well, the unkind have been known to say—the unkind being they who sing not, neither can they flirt. I hope you like scales, my beloved”—she swung the octave up to high A in a charming voice—“because I want to work like yeast while I am here, and if you don't I'll have to move the piano into the barn.”

“So that's it; you sing, child,” said Katharine, reflectively. “I think I'm sorry for you.”

“Sorry for me!” Airlie stared at her in utter petrification.

“Yes, very sorry for you. Because music when it amounts to a gift is the one of all others that makes its possessor most unhappy. It's something like horses. The horse is the noblest of animals. There is nothing in him to degrade. But if a man gives his time and thought too seriously to horses, you know what he inevitably becomes. It is exactly the same with music. There is no art that enters so nobly and generally into life—there is none that is so vicious in its effect upon its devotees. Or else it's the other way around”—Katharine smiled mischievously

at the girl—"to be a devotee in the most inclusive sense of the word one must first be——"

"An imbecile," suggested Airlic, promptly. "Well, of all things! To think that I should have journeyed from my humble home in Windwater to listen to such treason as this. Why, do you realise that on my native heath I've been a public idol? And that I've outgrown the heath—that I want a wider audience—that I mean to have it?"

"Of course. That's just it. Airlic, did you ever know a happy musician?"

"Happy!" echoed the girl, scornfully. "Wait until you hear me sing. Melba simply isn't in it with me. But I sha'n't interfere with the old girl's career just yet. I want her to be sure of a competence against old age. I have everything I need to be a great success except one little item. Ochoe!" Her face assumed an expression of such woe that Katharine rippled with laughter.

"What is that?"

"Inches, my dear, inches. Oh, if I were only as tall and elegant as you. To be a triumph on the stage—of course it's the stage I'm after—one should be a daughter of the King of Bashan. Instead of which, whenever I want to see anything or have anybody see me, I've got to climb a tree like Zacchæus. The free advertising that

tall people get is enough to break one's heart. Of course a judicious combination of heels and hats accomplishes a good deal for me whene'er I take my walks abroad, but fancy Juliet drinking the poison in a high hat, or lying cold in death on her bier with two five-inch French heels taking aim at eternity in full view of the audience! But listen—I'll make you forget all about my being only five feet one inch and half an eighth high."

She sat down to the piano and began to sing in a voice deliciously young and sweet and singularly sympathetic, and as she passed from one song to another, she revealed a range of feeling that showed the characteristic quality of the artist to be hers—the vicarious consciousness capable of entering into and interpreting that which it has never known. Katharine listened, thrilled to the depths of her smothered soul. Voices long silent spoke to her heart, and set the echoes of the past quivering in its sealed recesses.

Robin Adair?—Ah, she could not bear that—the child ought to know—had she no feeling?

If she could only have seen him dead! That would have been but the balance of a grain of dust against the weight of worlds in comparison with what she had suffered. If she might only have kissed his lips forever still with their tale of

love for her but half told, the tears of her sorrow would have been sweetest balm to her bereaved heart.

Ah, that haunting face of Isabel! She had had terrible times of torture when she saw it transformed—tender and responsive. To whom? O God, to him! She had followed them until her imagination fainted through scenes such as she had never known. Why? She was cruelly truthful to herself. Because that woman gave him more than she ever had. More of what?

She had analysed questions horrible to her with unflinching candour. Would her boy grow up to measure the things of the spirit with the eyes of flesh, to sneer at the fine reserve, to mock at the exquisite illusions whereby the noblest women made life fit to be lived?

But had her husband ever so sneered—in his heart? There had been a woman's sensitive delicacy about the lover who became her husband and the husband who remained so long her lover.

“What made the ball so fine?
Robin Adair”

carolled the girl in her sweet, passionately sad, young voice.

Ah, therein lay the mystery. How could such a man ever have sunk to the love of such a

woman as Isabel Durance, whose very face bore upon it her defiance of all that he had seemed most to revere? What had become now, after two years of such living, of the lofty ideals with which he had captured her maiden fancy? Had all that she had loved so dearly, all that was fine and noble in him, been then but a mask, or the mere reflex perhaps of her own desires for him?

She knew better—some precious instinct had held her to her faith in him, as day after day she had battled for his soul with the invisible powers of darkness, until there had grown up in her almost unconsciously the habit of calling in the unanswering silence to the good in him, as she had once told Regester she would. Steadfastly she had hedged him about with all that was finest and purest in her thought, with a faith in her power to reach him at first faltering, but which had in its quivering persistence the ultimate patience of God.

“Oh, it was parting from,
Robin Adair.”

“Airlie, don’t, dear, don’t. It’s too sweet. I can’t bear it.”

Airlie sprang from the piano. “Well, if that isn’t just like me! There never was such a girl for everlastingly putting her foot in it. It’s a

mercy the Lord was foresighted enough to give me such a little one, or the havoc would have been something awful. Kathie, I want to tell you something I think you don't know, dear." She sat down on the arm of the chair, and pil- lowed Katharine's head against her. "You're a saint, sweetheart, and I want you to try and get over it, for it's a frame of mind and body only fit for hymn-books, and if you want me to stay with you you've just got to give over hankering after a halo yet awhile. Haloes belong in heaven, dear, and you're not there yet by a long shot, thank goodness. I see clearly that I've been sent here by a discriminating Providence for the sole and simple purpose of healthily contaminating you."

Half an hour later the girl communed with herself. "Yes, that expression on her face is enough to kill a body. But I'm going to break her of that. And one of these days I'm going to see that man Mackemer, or may my name indeed be Mrs. John Cassius Dargey!"

Long after Airlie slept, Katharine lay awake, pondering the problems that ached in her heart. Yet at last in the darkness she smiled. What a girl this little cousin was! There were times when her smart talk wearied—when it seemed almost artificial, yet of her genuine sweetness and

sincerity there was no doubt in Katharine's mind. The child was playing with life just now, even naïvely, innocently conscious of the charm of her own part in the game, but in her brave blue eyes there was abundant promise of much that her gay tongue would now have derided. Katharine sighed. Ah, let the child play in the sunshine yet awhile. For who could tell what canopy of cloud the night of life might even now have in weaving for her?

CHAPTER V

AIRLIE came back from her first singing-lesson in fits of laughter. "That man is going to be the death of me," she said. "O Jerusalem! I sang a few scales and things and he groaned and grunted like a bear with the tooth-ache, but still I felt encouraged, because he didn't throw anything at me. He's a little chap, but built on the bay-window plan so that most of him gets there too soon, you know. 'Yes, yes,' he said, at last, 'you will do, you will be Patti'—this seemed to me a pretty dizzy proposition on so short an acquaintance—'but you must eat, eat, all the time eat. I see bones, bones, everywhere bones. It will not do. You can nevaire, nevaire sing on bones,' and the creature actually scornfully poked my bones with a finger as big as my arm. 'Fat, fat,' he murmured, ecstatically, 'be fat and you will be famous. I am fat, and now, you, you, skinnee one, listen. You shall hear how the to seeng is done by a great, great artecest.' And truly I did, Kathie. I wish you

could have heard him. It was simply magnificent. I shall never forget it as long as I live. I could have bawled—it was so beautiful. When he had finished he stuck his head on one side like a Brobdingnagian bird and looked up at me and said: ‘You like that? You t’ink it lofely? Your heart go pit-pat, pit-pat?’ ‘Lovely,’ I echoed. ‘Why, it’s divine. Why, Jean de Reszke—’ ‘Jean de Reszke, my little child. But *I* am Jean de Reszke, I am all—all—I am the speerit, the essence, the what-you-call-it, the divinitee of song’—and so the fat little man may be, Kathie, but I could wish that his looks more exactly fitted the part. Well, I sang some more and he discoursed on tone-production and many other things, but quite unexpectedly in the midst of his peroratings he grasped himself and swayed to and fro like a ship in a storm, wailing like a choked calliope all the time. I felt awfully embarrassed, but I just kept still, and waited anxiously for the noise to stop. Suddenly he turned on me. ‘You know what?’ he snaps like a firecracker. I protested earnestly that I didn’t. He callioped a little more and then sputtered (shades of my pious youth): ‘Well, I am a tam fool. You are a tam fool. That is what the peoples in this house t’ink when they hear you seeng. But why am I tam fool? Because I have eat too moch

—peeg, peeg.' I couldn't tell whether this referred to what he had eaten, or to what he was. 'Why are *you* a tam fool? Because they t'ink you cannot seeng. *Now* let them hear!' His remarks seemed to me to lack logical sequence, but I charitably put that down to the 'peeg,' and meekly piped my prettiest until he uncorked the calliope again. 'Oh, I so seek, I so seek,' he groaned. 'Good-by now. I go to see the doctor. Peeg! Peeg! And you—you go home, queeck, queeck. And not spik. Nevaire spik!' (Think of commands like that to me, Kathie!) 'You get no pay for spik, and spik wear out your lofely little t'roat. But some day you get beeg, beeg pay for seeng. Oh-h, I so seek. I suffaire agonee. I eat too moch of him! But you—you eat all the more you can. Take those bones home. Good-by. Me, I hurry to the doc-tor.' "

Katharine laughed a good deal. But then she looked doubtful. "O Airlie, I wonder if you ought to go down there alone. Such a man—a perfect madman. What do you think?" she appealed to Regester, who had dropped in during Airlie's recital of her experiences with Signor Vecellio.

But it was not in Airlie's nature to allow any man's opinion to adjust her affairs for her, and

before he could answer she said, smartly: "Why, Cousin Katharine, do you suppose I can't manage that little man or——"

"Any other?" suggested Regester.

"Well, that remains to be seen. Kathie dear, I wrote Cassius the sweetest letter last Sunday recommending another girl. I did, you know." She nodded at Katharine. "I was dying to let you see it, but I was afraid."

"Afraid! Why?"

"Oh, my dearie," said the girl, leaning over and laying her bit of a hand on Katharine's, "because you're you, and I'm only Airlie. And Airlie is a bad child."

Regester went away laughing. But he thought that nothing better could have happened to Mrs. Mackemer than the coming of this sweet, shrewd, irrational child into her life. She was like a wild spring wind, and the air about Katharine had been too pitifully still.

"Um-m-m-h! What a dreadful young doctor-man," said Airlie, after some moments of thought. "There he sits and sizes you up as if you were old clothes for sale. He looks at your teeth to see how old you are, and he makes you trot to try your paces, and you've got to gallop to show your wind. Does that sound metaphorical, dear, because I meant it to? But it's just what

he does. Does he come here often?" she ended abruptly.

"Oh, I don't know. Why should he?"

"But you like him?"

"It would be strange if I didn't," said Katharine, a trifle stiffly. "He has been so good to Whitney."

"Oh, has he? Well, Kathie, dear, to be frank with you, I fail to see any startling evidence of righteousness about that. Any right-minded man would think it a privilege to be allowed to be good to a boy like Whitney."

"But why need you infer that he is not right-minded?"

Airlie laughed. "Kathie, you're getting subtle. So let's talk of other, nobler things—of shoes and bats and fiddle-strings!"

Airlie and Whitney were great chums, and Katharine readily realised what a boon her visit was to the boy. He was nine years old now, but sometimes he seemed years beyond that, for he had been so much with his mother that his ideas were but little reflective of those of other children; he had the charming naïveté of a child who does his own thinking. The depth of his affection for his mother was a revelation to Airlie.

"Does he always kiss you like that before he

goes to school?" she asked, after she had been with Katharine some weeks.

"Why, of course."

"How funny!"

"Funny?"

"Of *course* it's funny, Cousin Katharine. I never remember Them kissing me in my life, until I came away the other day, and then they were so frightened at it that it was more like a bite than a kiss."

"How strange! Yet they love you."

"Love me? To be sure they do, awfully, but they can't escape the idea that there would be something immoral in showing it. I often wondered how mother ever let any man be so depraved as to mention his affection to her. And how he came to love her anyway—well, that's another thing, and we won't harrow our brains by trying to solve it. But one day I surprised her looking over a lot of letters. She read one over and over again, and actually blushed. I was devoured with curiosity and I said: 'Why, my only mother, what are you reading? You act as if it was a love-letter.' That stirred her up fearfully, and I had to wait until she had taken off her spectacles and put them in their case, and folded up the letter and put it back in the envelope, before she had sufficiently calmed

her agitation to be able to say in the sort of tone in which you might announce the destiny of empires: 'Daughter Airlie, it is a love-letter.' 'I bet it's the only one you ever got, mother,' I said, in a really godless manner. But that didn't disturb her. 'My dear,' she replied, with all the dignity of crowns and courts in her manner, 'it was the only one I ever *desired*; it made me happy for a lifetime. It was your dear father's declaration of his affection for me, and I always read it again on the anniversary of my receiving it.' Of course that just made me wild, and I simply clamoured for it, and she fluttered about most unhappily. 'No, Daughter Airlie, I couldn't show it to you. I really couldn't,' and do you know, Kathie, I saw at last that it would hurt her to let me see it—that it really was something that she held sacred between herself and my father—that the bloom would be gone from it even if she let his own daughter see it. But she compromised at last. 'I will let you see my answer, Daughter Airlie. Perhaps some day when you are old enough it may help you to know how a lady would accept the devotion of a—a—gentleman she admired and—and—honoured.' O Kathie, she was simply a dear that afternoon, the innocentest thing alive. Fancy her thinking she could give me pointers on the man question.

Oh, that letter! I remember every word of it. It began, 'Respected Sir,' and begged to be allowed to acknowledge his communication of the whatever-it-was instant. Then she asked permission to remark that she had perused it with feelings of emotion, tempered by a deep sense of her unworthiness of the honour he had deigned to confer upon her. But if in the providence of God it should be shown to be His will that their lives should be united to His glory, she thought it might not be out of place for her to say that she had always entertained for him the highest regard, and that she would be at home that evening after eight o'clock. Now, did you ever hear anything neater than that? Just fancy me listening to it. I had to let a gurgle out somewhere, and I said: 'Mother, do tell me. Did he kiss you when he came?' But she wouldn't peach. She was really human that day, though. I thought I understood a little how my daddy came to love her. She must have been very sweet and girlish at thirty-six, you know, in cork-screw curls."

"My dear, I daresay she was quite a flirt in her way," said Katharine.

"A flirt! My mother? Why, that's a most disturbing idea, Kathie. I never dreamed of such a thing before. But I'll bet a bean it's ex-

actly what she was. And that shows how basely our very own parents delude us."

Airlie often took Whitney to the city with her, and the boy enjoyed these excursions greatly. For his sake they went up and down from bottom to top and back again in all the elevators of every building they went into. These trips were agony to Airlie, but she endured them with a seraph's smile, and after all they were not as terrible as always having to sit in the front seat of the open cars, in heroic disregard of the unkindest wind and weather. One day in their meanderings about they discovered what they called the "animal shop," and there Whitney afterward spent hours of unalloyed bliss. There were rabbits and rats and guinea-pigs and mice, and parrots and canaries, and cats and pups of every description. Airlie generally sat down among the cats, while Whitney wandered about exchanging fascinating natural history notes with the owner of the collection. "Of course you are the happiest man in the whole world," he said to him one day.

"Cos w'y?" asked the man, stolidly.

"Now, how could he ask that?" remarked Whitney to Airlie afterward. "And he's often told me he loved them all."

"Yes, but still you know, Whit, the at-

mosphere's pretty rich in there, and I daresay it's a strain on his affections at times."

"You mean the smell in there, Cousin Airlie? Why, it's a lovely smell." Whitney sniffed in pensive retrospection. "And the noise of them all, scratching and scraping, and miaowing, and purring, and singing, and talking, and barking—Oh, I hope Mamma will let me keep an animal shop when I'm a man."

It was while they were taking lunch one day during an expedition of this sort that Airlie suddenly saw a curious change pass over Whitney's face.

"What is it, Whit?" she asked, anxiously.

The child looked at her sharply. Then he said, carelessly: "Oh, nothing," and applied himself strenuously to his luncheon. But the gayety had all faded from his little face. He had even forgotten that under his chair in that precious crate were a pair of what the animal man called "Imulayan ra-b-t-s."

"But, Whit, darling, what is it?" said Airlie, in distress. "Why, Whit, you tell me everything."

"But this—this—" he hesitated, and the colour covered his face miserably. "O Cousin Airlie, I think you must please excuse me. I think I mustn't talk about it."

"O Whit!" the girl murmured. A sudden illumination had come to her, and his loyalty touched her heart.

The place was full of men, crowding in to their hurried lunch from the offices all around. She scanned their faces sharply. Here was Whitney beside her, the image of his father, as she had heard, and somewhere in that mass of men about her sat the boy's father. She quivered with excitement. He must have just come in, yet, though she studied face after face, no inspiration came to her. Every now and then she glanced at Whitney, but he was as profound a part of the puzzle as any other; she perceived that he was in an acute state of excitement, yet every power his nine short years of life had developed in him was strained to the utmost to repress all sign of it. He ate his meal with minute attention to its details—the peppering of his omelet was apparently a matter which absorbed his soul, but the child sitting there so still, so politely attentive to her needs, was so pervious to his father's presence, that the man's every movement was stamping itself enduringly upon his shrinking nerves. Her tender heart cried out for Whitney. What part had he had in it all that he should have to suffer for what he could so little understand?

But why could she not discover that man—she, who had such reason to pride herself on her acuteness? And his portrait hung in the Glendage dining-room still. Where *was* the man?

There was a simultaneous loosening from their places of the men who had poured in tumultuously but a few moments before; the exodus which followed left far-reaching gaps here and there, and in the curiously sudden subsiding of the hubbub about them, individual voices became unexpectedly distinct. Airlie listened sharply to two men behind her of whose presence she had not been previously aware, but she grew irritated, for they talked the gibberish of the Board of Trade, and there was nothing in what was said to indicate the Mackemer of her conceptions. One of them had a charming voice. "It feels like stroking beautiful fur," she thought, "but it never could belong to such a besotted being as Whitney's father."

His companion began to talk in eager, excited tones about some deal upon which his very existence seemed staked; then with a lightning change of topic he said, with pitiless distinctness: "Saw your wife yesterday, Mackemer, on the Lake Shore Drive. She looked stunning, let me tell you."

Into the little face opposite there flashed a

look that Airlie never forgot. "Oh, Whit," she exclaimed breathlessly, "we must be going, boy. We'll never get the three-thirteen if we don't." Her face was crimson; her eyes felt as if they were burning through to the back of her head. The child shuffled off his chair without a word, and began to struggle with his coat, while she hurriedly gathered their purchases together.

"Here, Whit, let me help you," said that voice with its charming intonation, and Airlie turned to find herself confronted by Mackemer. But he looked only at his boy, his face tremulous with tenderness.

"Whit, are you well? Are you happy?" It was like the cry of a violin under a master touch.

Whitney buttoned his coat carefully. "Yes," he answered without a glance at his father. "I'm well, thank you; and I'm happy. But mother isn't." Then he looked up—a flame of defiance in his sweet eyes.

"Oh, Whit, we must go," broke in Airlie. This was terrible to her—the mere mention of Katharine's name a desecration. But Mackemer caught the boy's hand. "Don't ever forget me, Whit. I'm always thinking of you. Some day, perhaps——"

"But there's mother," said Whitney. "And why don't you come home?" His voice was piti-

less; he stepped back from his father. Mackemer flushed deeply.

"Ah, you must take care of your mother, Whit," he answered with an effort at lightness. "Good-by, boy. Don't forget. Don't ever forget, Whit." His eyes clung to the child's face; he saw it through a cloud, the agony of a man's unshed tears.

"Come, Whitney, you must carry the rabbits, dear, and hurry, hurry." Airlie took his hand insistently; they moved away, but at the door the little figure turned for a backward look, and Mackemer watched it in that horrible blur of pain. He felt the iron grip of the child upon his heart as never before. All sorts of memories besieged him—the things that he never thought about, the things that he had deliberately obliterated from his life.

His boy—oh, the misery of it! It was his own, but it looked at him with eyes that judged. What did he know? What did his mother tell him? Frightful—that there should have been cast over his boy's life the shadow of such a problem as this! If the child could but have lived with him—what, *lived with him*? It came to him with the force of a blow that a child would seem strangely out of place in a home such as his. Why? Ah, he fled in fear from that

strangely critical mood in which he had several times found himself of late. But his memory, so thickly starred with those pictures of the past which had captured his imagination at the moment, recalled a vision of a sweet young Katharine with her baby in her arms, a Madonna at whose feet his soul had revelled in adoration. Oh, it was a great thing!—motherhood. That child, Whit, would go through life with the thought of his mother pedestalled in a sacred niche of his heart. How loyal he was to her! Mackemer's eyes grew bitter; then softened. Yes, yes; the boy's training would be just what it ought to be. Katharine was a good woman. He had caught a glimpse of her one day on State Street, and it had come over him with an appalling clearness of realisation that set every nerve biting, that once—not long ago—she had been his wife. "What is it? What have I done?" he asked himself in the bewilderment that followed. But when he looked again she was gone, and he remembered, and shook himself free from the horror that had clutched him for the moment. Yet for days afterward the faint odour of the violets which always clung to his thought of her haunted him with curious persistence. And to-day the accident of seeing Whitney had betrayed him into a train of

thought that seemed shaded with regret. What folly! He wished nothing different from what it was.

And yet an hour later as he sat talking with a client the sound of the brave little voice—"But Mother isn't happy," swayed him against his will, and affected his judgment in a way entirely adverse to his interests.

"You see, there's your little girl, Gaviller. Of course if it wasn't for her you and your wife could separate easily enough. But it's deuced hard on the child."

"Say, Mackemer, I didn't come here to get your advice about separating from my wife. I came here to discuss the possible terms of the separation with you."

"Oh, of course. But you'll find it pretty hard to keep the terms in good working order. I suppose you'd like to see your child once in a while?"

"See my child! Well, I guess I'll see my child whenever I want to. She won't be any less my child just because I don't happen to be living in the same house with her mother any more."

"Oh, yes, she will. You'll find it a much more difficult proposition than you think. You'll be hankering after the child all the time, but if she's with a mother who's separated from you you

won't get much joy out of seeing her, let me tell you."

"Damn it all! You bet I'll see my child."

Mackemer sharpened a pencil carefully. "Of course, if there was another woman in the case——"

"Another woman? I guess I know enough not to tangle myself up with another of 'em," growled Gaviller.

"I saw Mrs. Gaviller the other day," remarked Mackemer, conversationally. "I suppose she used to be quite a pretty woman."

"Well, I guess Mrs. Gaviller's a pretty good-looking woman still. Great Scot, man! You talk as if she was old enough to be her own grandmother."

"Oh, if you insist upon having it a straight divorce she'll marry again easily enough," said Mackemer. "Now I don't call her a pretty woman, but there's something about her that takes a man's eye every time."

The man opposite him moved uneasily in his chair.

"Naturally, a woman like that is the devil to live with sometimes, but if you have a fancy for Dresden china you have got to pay the price. But don't get thinking you can separate from your wife, and hang on to your child. You can't.

Say, how's that deal coming out with the Lackner people?"

Gaviller got up to go. "Gee! It's later than I thought. I've got an appointment with those people."

"But how is it coming on?" asked Mackemer, with interest.

"Like hell. They're damned Juggernauts, those fellows, and don't care whose dead bodies they ride over, so long as they get there. See you later, Mackemer," and he was gone.

Mackemer leaned back in his chair, reflective. "But you won't see me later, Gaviller. Whit, I guess that's one for you to-day. Talk about Fate—Providence!"

He shrugged his shoulder.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Mackemer reached home that evening he found Isabel waiting for him in the dusk, an effectively sombre frame for the brilliance of the picture she made kneeling in the glow of the red fire.

"Ah, I was listening for my lord's step," she cried, "and I never heard it." She turned her face to him with an enchanting gesture, and when he had kissed her he held her away from him, his deep blue eyes alight.

"Oh, beautiful, beautiful!" he murmured. "Darling, you are new to me every day."

She lifted her face to him again like a flower seeking the sun, and again he kissed her, on her white drooping eyelids, her hair, and last, a touch of his lips to her fair shoulder.

A faint breath of perfume yielded its sweetness to the air as she stirred in his arms; it seemed but the very fragrance of her beauty. Oh, it was divine, this luxury of full abandonment to her, the abandonment of the man to the woman. Love—? She had discovered it for him; with

her, marriage had been a series of sacraments in the scented temple of their home. And he might have missed it all! Time and again, with her loveliness languid in his arms, he had thought of that.

After dinner they went into the library together; she lighted his cigar, then sat on his knee. She was a restful woman. A man never struck a snag in his relations with her; she was so frankly human, and so content to be a woman—in a world with men. She had such ability to gauge his frame of mind and adapt herself to it, but it did not occur to him that that particular quality belonged not inherently to her, but to her type. It amused him to watch her clever manipulations of him when some end was—not in dispute, for with her nothing ever was in dispute—but in doubt; they were so delicate in comparison with other women's clumsy methods. It was an artistic gratification to yield to her—she merely consented to victory.

"Oh, of course, you know I'm a diplomat," she had said to him poutingly that morning. "But I'm a failure because you know I am. And I make you laugh, don't I, darling, away up in your sleeve? I know you always know just what I'm after."

"Why, of course I do," he said, enjoyingly.

Isabel looked pensive; she did not mention that she had a sleeve too.

She was still thinking of this to-night, as she watched him silent with his cigar. How little he had suspected his future when she had fallen in love with him, as she called it, the third or fourth time that she had seen him. How well she remembered the night when she had gone up to her room in the summer hotel, with her fierce heart on fire; how she had leaned out of her window listening to his voice on the piazza below, and had whispered to him in the hot breath-beats he could not hear, but which she meant to force him to feel: "You shall love me; you shall love me!"

Just to remember it now sent the colour to her cheeks, and quickened the even rhythm of her heart.

And then in the darkness of the deserted night, long after his voice was still, she had sat alone, and had planned, step by step, her future and his. And the next day she had sauntered across the piazza, and standing at the top of the steps had raised her finger and beckoned him from his wife's side. He came to her, and together they strolled across the sands to the edge of the sea, and she kept him there that long, long afternoon. She had laughed loud in her heart at his proud

unprotesting wife. Didn't the poor fool know that this was not the moment to ascend a pedestal as Virtue Scorned, and sit there in all the silence of stone?

Yet this conquest had not been easy. For after a time, she found deep in the man Mackemer a strain of righteousness that puzzled and defied her long. There was at the root of him a child-like longing to "be good," which became at times disconcertingly evident. It was a revelation to her, and as the devil would have it, it served but to enhance his value a thousand times in her eyes. She would have sold her soul a thousand times, once to possess him, after she discovered that slight, insistent, silver streak of righteousness amid the dross. But what to do with it—how to conquer it? Ah, no! How to make it her ally, the very means of her victory?

She smiled now as she looked at him, and his eyes answered her silently. What a boy he was still! What a boy he had been!

"What are you thinking of?" she asked, presently, leaning over and touching his cheek.

"I was thinking of Whit," he answered, seriously.

"Ah, dear little Whit!" she murmured. "I could love him so, darling."

"Love him? Of course you could, sweet-

heart." His face lighted up. "Some women wouldn't, you know. But you——"

She bent her cheek against his; he turned his head until their lips met.

"I saw the little chap to-day," he said, after a moment.

"You saw him? Where?"

"Oh, at Pasmore's. He sat there at the very next table to mine, getting his lunch."

He fell into moody silence, and she drew away from him, but she watched him with the eyes of a Jezebel, for she had not asked all her questions; there remained one, and it burned in her throat.

She had never told him of Katharine's visit to her, and she had spent the most passionate energy in denying it to her own remembrance. Yet it was not because she feared that pale-faced woman. It was her audacity that she resented. Forgiveness? What need had she of forgiveness? She fear that woman? But sometimes in the night she shivered.

And now her heart stormed at her husband's silence. There he sat thinking, with his eyes in the distance, no longer her lover, but a man unknown, revealing again those disquieting reaches of temperament which it taxed her so cruelly to fathom.

She sat there silent, the victim of an anger so intense that it left her no power to cope with its reason. Then she smiled. Why, what a fool she was! He was wax in her hands, yet here she was leaving him alone to think without her. That was not the way. He must talk out his soul to her and together they would exhaust this emotion, be tender to that, and scoff lightly at the other. Ah, he must never think alone, and to-night for a moment she had recklessly allowed him to do so.

"Dear little Whit!" she murmured again; her voice was sweet in her silky throat. "Was his mother with him, dear?"

"No, no. Some girl, a young, pretty thing."

"And did he look well?"

"Yes. Oh, he's grown so since I saw him last."

"Of course you spoke to him, dear."

"Yes, I spoke to him, but the girl had objections. Good Lord, Isabel! It was hard to be so near my own little chap, and then have him hurried away from me as if I had the small-pox."

Isabel said nothing, and Mackemer turned to look at her, a little surprised. She was always so sympathetic, and he felt that he needed sympathy just now. Then he saw that her eyes were bright with tears.

"Oh, my darling, what is it? What did I say? I've been a brute."

"No, no!" she whispered, "it's you I'm hurt for. My poor Clifford!"

"Me? Oh, Isabel, nothing matters so long as I have you. Never for one moment do I forget that."

Her face darkened away from his sight. He must not remember that he never forgot.

"Clifford," she said, suddenly, "was it wrong? But I loved you so. I want to be good. But it *was* wrong. Was it?"

"Wrong?" he breathed deeply, his eyes fastened like burrs on the picture she created for him. Against the dull green of the room, under the golden glow of the shaded lights she bewitched him with her allurements of form and colour. In her gown of clinging copper-coloured crêpe with its heavy bands of gleaming iridescent embroidery she seemed to him like some superb tropical flower, prodigal of bloom and perfume for him alone. Her throat and arms had the tint of living ivory against the narrow lines of deep-hued velvet about them; the fair pallor of her face heightened the scarlet of lips upon which love breathed warm, seductive.

"Wrong?" repeated Mackemer. "Oh, Isabel!"

To his ardent, beauty-loving soul this was one of their Elysian moments, and she had given him so many.

He said no more, but drew her into his arms. He forgot his child—he forgot everything but her, and his blue eyes told her so. Then to complete her thrall she went to the piano, for it was there that she had riveted the first chain about him.

“Meine Ruh is hin,
Mein Herz ist schwer,
Ich finde sie nimmer und nimmermehr.”

He watched her with dreaming eyes, following the curve of her throat as it melted into the long sweeping lines of a figure which now, save for the rising and falling of her warm breath, might have been the masterpiece of a Phidias so enchanting was her pose. She seemed to have forgotten him, but presently she slightly turned her head, and swept his face with her eyes. And in doing so she unconsciously fashioned of herself a startling reproduction of the Lorelei which hung upon the wall behind her—the Lorelei lovely with the allurements of death in her heart.

Something drew Mackemer's glance beyond Isabel; and he saw the picture as if for the first time, and looking, hated it, and wondered why.

“Mein Busen drängt sich nach ihm hin ;
Ach dürft ich fassen und halten ihn,”

sang Isabel in her rich, intense contralto, but when the song was finished she sat for some moments silent, her hands idle upon the keys; then after a few sombre chords, there in that smoke-dim room with the luring Lorelei above her, she began:

“Some day the silver chord will break,
And I no more as now shall sing——”

Mackemer laid down his cigar. An extraordinary feeling of repulsion swept over him. To sing that now—how could she? He looked at the Lorelei, then at Isabel, but beyond the two faces he had a strange vision of Katharine—Katharine, as he had loved her, with her pure St. Cecilia face, and her deep tender eyes.

“And I shall see Him face to face,
And tell the story, Saved by grace.”

Oh, God! It was intolerable.

But Isabel sang on, in a voice which had been taught every trick of its trade by a master of his art. In the throat of a less clever woman it would have been mediocre; as it was, it was a marvel of effectiveness. That was why she was

singing again in the Fourth Church. Naturally she had been dismissed, or rather she had resigned her position at the time of her divorce, for the church had been righteously pained by her conduct. But Isabel was a patient woman. She retired, but to a pew which she and Mackemer occupied as regularly as Sunday morning arrived. As for Mackemer he preferred going to church, having been inured to the habit from childhood. He thought that Isabel had acted ideally throughout the whole wretched affair, and though he wondered that she cared to attend that particular sanctuary after all that had passed, it was after all but another proof of her high mettle. So for a whole year Isabel sat in unobtrusive meekness in a pew and waited. Perhaps she would have sat there, even if she had not been waiting, for she never lost sight of that curious strain of righteousness in her husband which had been such a source of difficulty to her. It was well for him to see that she had a little streak of her own; men admired piety in women, and well they might, for they made it a difficult art for them.

A year is a long time, and her devotion was so impressive that before the end of it most people were charmed to forget that her name had not always been Mackemer. A pious nabob or two

smiled upon her, and presently a nabobess called, and was enchanted to find Isabel more demure than a nun. Then someone with a gift of euphemistic phrase called her marriage "romantic"; the epithet "scandalous" became shy, and was soon retired.

And Isabel waited smiling, with her eye on the choir. But when the organist, who at the time of her eclipse had loudly damned the decree that the music he provided must not only be sacred, but must also issue from moral throats, came to her breathless one Sunday morning with the news that the alto was ill, and could she—would she?—she debated the case with a deliberation and indifference that nearly drove him again to profanity. She was so out of practice. "Out of practice!" he retorted, irritably. "At any rate you simply couldn't flat like Miss Stephens. That girl has nearly killed me."

At last, well, yes, but only as a favour to him; she had always known he was a friend of hers. And she never went to the choir in better voice in her life, for she had been preparing herself for this moment ever since she had been forced from it, and the result was that the indisposed alto was persuaded to remain indisposed, and Mrs. Mackemer took her old place again in the most natural way. "Just think of the altos we've listened to

in the last year," exclaimed one of the most fashionable and exclusive saints in the congregation, "and with that dear sitting still in her pew all the time. I can't think how she endured it. Of course it was unfortunate about her divorce, but what else could she do? And anyway, I think it was simply magnificent of them to dare everything for each other. Now, there's Mrs. Lockyer. She and Mr. Leyden are perfectly devoted to each other, but she'll never get a divorce, and so she's awfully respectable, and it's all right. Well, it isn't. It's all wrong. The Mackemers just did the right and natural thing, but we're all so conventional we're scared of our lives of doing the natural thing."

To be sure, as far as singing in the Fourth Church was concerned, Isabel thought it a great bore. But it was what her reinstatement stood for that made it imperative to endure, for she had plans for the future in which her position in the church could be of the greatest service to her. There had arisen in her a strong craving for social recognition, of which she never admitted the cause to herself; she knew it too well. For she was never, for one waking moment, free from the scorching remembrance of Katharine. *Legally—morally!* How she hated those words. And once in a great while, even with all her

resolute self-control, she was unable to spare herself some consciously bitter moments. Her first husband had died within a few weeks after the granting of her divorce, thereby taking the cruellest revenge upon her which he could have devised, for could she only have foreseen such a dispensation of Providence how gladly she would have waited, and saved herself the odium and the financial loss of a divorce, for though she did not need his money, it galled her to think how easily she might have had it. Besides, with just that little waiting she might now have occupied a higher moral plane than Mackemer; at the time she had married him that would have seemed a ludicrous quixoticism. But she was well aware of the cause of this curious new growth of prudence in herself; it frightened her to remember how near at times she had come to losing Mackemer owing to the presence in herself of certain qualities over which she had once felt complacent. He had been a hard man for her to understand, and she chafed at his possession of those spiritual traits which seemed so out of place in his nature. It was all a mystery to her—this idealising of passion in terms of purity; she scoffed at it, but it constituted the subtlest type of appeal to a woman clever enough to know herself as did Isabel. For she taught herself

to minister to one side of Mackemer's nature with infinite skill and resource veiled beneath an innocence which she frequently found it a severe strain to maintain. She must always be tempting to him, but he must never suspect that he was tempted. Oh, Lord! But such men were difficult.

It was a strange thing that had come somehow into her life—this absorbing passion, this single devotion to one man, so utterly at variance with her temperament, and she was learning rebelliously, but inevitably, a new way of love, which fascinated and tormented her. Her sin was actually becoming a means of grace to her.

And to him?

“ And I shall see Him face to face,
And tell the story, Saved by grace.”

It was to be her solo on Sunday night at a “popular” service, and she sang it now as she would sing it then; she loved to sweep the strings of religious emotion, and she thrilled with the exhilaration of feeling that Mackemer responded to her touch now, just as the congregation would then.

Softer and softer she sang:

“ And I shall see Him face to face,”

and then, without a word, Mackemer left the room.

She sat there, alone, for a long time, motionless, looking at the silent keys of the piano, her face white, save for the still, scarlet line of her lips. For she had seen the look on his face as he left her, and she understood.

Then she went softly away to find him.

CHAPTER VII

“**K**ATHERINE’S out, and I’m glad of it,” said Airlie, calmly. “I’ve been dying to see you alone for an age.” Dr. Regester’s face expressed surprise. “I’m just worried to death, and I think you ought to do something about it.”

“Let me see your tongue,” he said, gravely.

“Thank you. I’ll have you hear it, instead, though Signor Vecellio does so object to my squandering the sweetness of my vocal chords for less than lucre, however filthy it may be. That man is a life experience in himself.” She sat down on a foot-stool and looked up at Regester with the frank eye of a child. He never thought of her as a woman. Her short, light-brown hair curling in a close mop all over her head, her tiny hands and her bits of feet, all aided the illusion which her manner confirmed. “I have discovered that he has a perfect mania for arranging romances between his pupils, and you see there’s a lovely tenor who’s been singing duets with me. Oh, I could listen to that young

man forever! But oh, oh! What do you think would be the very—very worst profession a perfectly divine tenor could pursue?"

"Butchering," suggested Regester, promptly.

Airlie was suffocated with laughter. "How did you know?" she demanded.

"I didn't."

"Ah, then you're one of those mind-reader people. I always have been afraid of you, and now lepers simply won't be in it in comparison." She drew herself and her foot-stool ostentatiously away from him. "Still, I'll tell you about the tenor. It's dreadfully disconcerting because you'd never dream to look at him that he'd been brought up in the midst of meat, and you can't help forgetting that he isn't a gentleman."

"Perhaps he is."

"Oh, no. You can see how it disturbs him to be treated like one. It's most embarrassing, because, of course, not having the least idea of the type of manners approved of in butchering circles, I cannot adapt myself to his level and relieve his distress. Oh, it's really awful. You would pity me, but while it's a trial to the flesh to have to be decent to him, it's a joy to the soul to sing with him. If only that dreadful little Vecellio would keep still! The wretched young man was hardly out of the room the other

day when he peered into my face and shrieked: 'You t'ink he seeng well?' 'Very well,' I said, ardently. 'You t'ink he handsome—he fine—he young?'—only he calls it yong. 'Oh, yes,' I answered, with less enthusiasm. 'Ah, ha! I see it. I know. You t'ink I not onnerstand. Me, me, who has lofed, lofed. Ah, you cannot hide it from me. You t'ink he lofely, he sweet, your soul melt like wax when he smile, and you t'ink Vecellio not know what all those t'ings means.' This is where I stamped my foot, but it didn't help anything. 'No, no, Mees Airlie, you cannot fool me. I am not an ass, a jackass, a fool,' and then he just smirked and giggled all through my lesson. It was awful. And the more I said, and the madder I got, the more he hugged himself and whispered, 'Leesten, leesten, it is the voice of lofe.' I was in such a rage that I simply screamed my song, and then he stamped with delight and whooped: 'Ah, see her now! She is little, and she is bonee, but she has it, the tramatic furee in her beeg, beeg soul all ready to die of lofe.' "

"But how can you learn anything from such a little monkey?" asked Regester.

"Learn anything? Why, he teaches you more in five minutes than anyone else would in a year. But think of it! After I got away from my

lesson it occurred to me that just as he talks to me about the butcher creature even so does he likewise unto the butcher creature about me."

"Of course. How will you face your divine tenor next time?"

Airlie groaned. Then she brightened. "Oh, well, it's all in the day's work. And, after all, it isn't the boy's fault. Though I do think that with such a spiritual voice he should have got away from a meat environment by this time. But never mind him now. I want to talk to you about Katharine. Don't you think it's awful?"

"Awful? But just what, Miss Casler?"

"Just what?" repeated the girl, indignantly. "As if there could be any 'just what' about it. Why, it makes me ill thinking about it all. Didn't I even meet that awful man in the restaurant the other day?"

"But what man?"

"Why, that Mackemer man, of course. And wasn't Whit with me, that dear, dear little Whit."

"Did he see you?"

"Did he see anything else? He actually dared to come and speak to Whit."

"It's his child."

"Much he cared for his child," retorted Arlie, with infinite scorn.

"I imagine he cared a great deal."

"How could he? Oh, you're only a man and I suppose you think he acted as he had a perfect right to if he wanted to."

Regester smiled at her vehemence. "It's quite a large question. And I believe that no one has perceived that more clearly than Mrs. Mackemer herself."

"Katharine? Oh, Katharine makes me faint. There are some things a woman ought to hate healthily, and she simply won't say one word."

"She's a woman of ideals," said Regester, coldly.

"Ideals! She can have them by the dozen, if she likes, but they're meant to look at on the top shelf where they won't get smashed. She insists upon using them every day, and, of course, they're bound to get wrecked, and then she won't even sweep up the remnants and throw them out. She cherishes them still, and there isn't any wisdom about that."

"Oh!"

"And then there's Whit. That's what makes it so cruel. People with children ought never to be allowed to get a divorce. What can he understand about it? He remembers his father here in the home, and he loved the man, and now it's all an awful puzzle to him. Don't you

see, he thinks fathers and mothers were born fathers and mothers. I mean to him they're something eternal, just as he is eternal to himself as Whitney Mackemer. And this thing upsets the whole order of the Universe to him. He can't feel sure of anything any more."

"Yes, it's bad, of course," said Regester. "But there it is, and what can you do?"

"Well, I think something ought to be done about it," retorted Airlie, energetically. "There's Katharine with a broken heart, and Whitney growing up with his morals all in a muddle. I think I'll go home again. I'm sick of watching miseries."

"Oh, don't! Stay here and regulate things." She shrugged a scornful shoulder at him.

"There's only one thing Mrs. Mackemer can do," he ventured presently.

"What?" demanded Airlie.

"She can get married again, and be happy ever after."

Airlie jumped from her foot-stool. "Kathie get married!" she gasped. "And you think she would?"

"Lots do," he answered, composedly. "Please don't waste that dramatic expression in private life, Miss Casler. Keep it carefully. It was well done."

"My Kathie, and you think she would get married again!"

"I didn't say so. I merely suggested to you what a reasonable solution marriage would be of all these problems that appear to vex you so. Whitney would get a new lease of a father—why, he might even take the man's name, according to that extremely neat arrangement of which some widows are fond, and there would be the domestic outfit all freshly painted and papered as good as new again."

"And you would like to see Kathie married like that, then?"

"I didn't say so," he answered again. "But my ideas of marriage are quite sane. Yours are not; they're just a bundle of sentiments, neatly tied up in true-lover's blue-ribboned knots, aren't they?"

"Oh, never mind about mine. Won't you enlighten me with yours, please? She picked up a piece of work and settled herself coseily on the divan, against an enormous crimson cushion, and in her little pale blue house-frock with her tiny feet in their foolish bits of red slippers dangling helplessly above the floor she had much more than the naïve grace and unconscious charm of a child. "But fetch me a foot-stool, first," she said, gravely. "That one." She pointed with an imperious finger.

He brought it, and, as he placed it for her, he found himself arrested by a remembrance of his mother. In those far-off days when life had been such a struggle with poverty, her son had never set a chair for her, or even carried a stick of wood for her fire, and she had been proud of it. That was her conception of devoted motherhood. It was more. Had her child been a daughter, she would have ruled it tyrannically, but from the moment she knew that she had gotten a man-child from the Lord, her soul had bowed itself in homage, for her theory of existence implied no place for woman save in the service of man. Not that she ever said that; she merely lived it, the most dangerous form of faith.

The boy brought himself up, and in time took his uncorrected faults sternly in hand, but his heart hardened against his mother. She had been the slave of his physical needs, but she had remained ignorant of his soul while she busily baked and brewed, and it turned from her to seek sustenance elsewhere. She had constituted herself her boy's servant, and he took her at her own valuation. After awhile she dimly recognised some flaw in their relationship, yet even that but ministered to her pride in him, for a woman with so remarkable a son could not expect to under-

stand him, but strangely enough she convinced herself in the stubborn silences of her heart that his genius was sole inheritance from her. His father? Yes, he had been a man, and she had done her duty and treated him accordingly. That was all. When she died, the boy, far away in college making a desperate struggle for the bare chance of education, said, simply: "Poor mother!" and turned over the next page. It was a pitiful epitaph.

It had not taken Airlie long to discover that this was a young man from whom graceful little courtesies—or as she described it, "parlor tricks," were not to be expected, consequently it delighted her to set him grovelling for the foot-stool.

"Aren't they pretty?"

"What?" he asked.

"My shoes, sir."

"I wasn't thinking of them."

"Oh, oh! Then stop staring at them." She bent down, and with an absurd severity of gesture, covered them with a tiny square of lace.

"You call that a handkerchief?" he hazarded.

"Oh, I admit it lacks the essential qualities of a sheet," she answered, gravely.

He surveyed her with a smile. "Such a doll and her outfit as it is!" he thought, benevolently.

"Now I'm all ready for your ideas," she said, darting a look at him.

"My ideas?" he echoed, vaguely. Yes, her hair *was* pretty in those foolish little rings all over her head.

"On marriage, you know. I hunger for enlightenment."

"Oh!" He considered a moment. "Of course, I suppose to you marriage is entirely an affair of sentiment." She nodded her head vigorously.

"What an absurdity!" he continued. "The home is, of course, the most essential possession of the state, and religion and romance have united to protect it, but it's a question whether the pious and sentimental toggery with which the institution has been loaded hasn't really done it more harm than good."

"Oh!" said Airlie, in a profound tone. "I see you don't believe in anything so silly as affinities and all that."

"Neither do you. Generally speaking, any man will suit any woman, and vice versa. Naturally when Mrs. A. has lived ten years with Mr. A., she understands him a good deal better than Mrs. B., who has been busy adapting herself to Mr. B's freaks. That's all there really is to it."

"Oh!" said Airlie again. "Thank you. I feel so enlightened."

"Well, if you saw day after day what I do——"

"I'd so much rather not, if you please. But I wish mother could hear you talk. She's so out of date. She believes with all her soul in—what is it you call it?—oh, love! I'd nearly forgotten. Love! And yet, in some respects, her opinions are quite like yours. For she and Aunt Betha think that all that I need to make me love John Cassius is the calm and deliberate conviction that it's the proper thing for me to do. And I'm sure I should have adored him long ago if that thing that beats affinity—I think the philosophers call it propinquity, but it's such a hard word for a little girl to say—could have done the trick. For it seemed to me my world was bang full to bursting of nothing but J. C. D. I do wish you could see him and settle the case for me. Though really the kind of man he is has nothing to do with it, has it? because any old kind will do to marry."

"Undoubtedly. For instance, if all the married couples in this town were compelled by a law which made it the proper thing to do, to exchange partners every three years—if that were the general custom—why, it would be

thought a most admirable arrangement. It is very questionable whether there would be as much heart-break associated with it as there is with our present system. You can think of dozens of points to recommend the scheme. One needs to take a large and liberal view of matters of this sort, Miss Casler. You can't prove that the Martians don't have this system, you know, and that they wouldn't think ours immoral in comparison. It's all just in the point of view."

"I see," said Airlie, gravely. "But I feel a little dizzy, thank you. This idea of progressive husbands and wives appeals to me, though, and I quite understand now why you think that Kathie could so easily marry again."

"But did I say that?" he asked with a change of tone. He was looking out of the window, which, owing to the position of the house in the turn of the road toward the hill, commanded a far view of the straight avenue leading into Glen-edge, and in the distance he saw Katharine coming slowly home—the slight lonely figure that he knew so well, etched sharp against the winter-white background.

"Come and look at her," he said, quietly. But Airlie watched him. "I never want to see her happy," he continued, with a strange breaking through to some inner depth. "Here in the

midst of plenty of happy commonplace lives she's like a noble tragedy. I never meet her without an uplift into a purer air. It is an inspiration to see her suffer."

Airlie's eyes flashed. "Oh, you are cruel. Kathie's miseries are not a spectacle."

"Ah, could you think I meant that? No, no, child, no."

When he was gone, Airlie got down on the floor and pounded it hard with her two fists. "What are you doing?" asked Katharine, when she came in.

"Merely pretending I'm Providence, my dear, and pounding that Edward Regester as he deserves."

"But what has *he* been doing? Making love to you?"

"No, my darling. He doesn't know enough. But please never use that word again. It's obsolete."

"Oh, then, you have been talking about it."

"No, dear. Not about It. Merely about marriage. And what topic more suitable for man and maid? Oh, I've had surgical operations performed upon my outlook on life to-day, dear. I'm not at all the narrow-minded infant I was a few hours ago. I think the theory is about like this: A man marries the woman that he happens

to see most of just when he happens to be in the mood to see most of them. And that theory is a perfect explanation of how the poor little minister at Windwater, left a widower with six children, happened to marry five more and the widow next door to him, and he with not enough to feed his family, and she with nothing to feed hers. But there's a new baby now, and perhaps the Lord will provide for the round dozen, but the church dozen't (if you'll kindly overlook the pun, Kathie, dear), and doesn't intend to, for mother says in her letter this morning that she hears they have asked him to move his half-orphan asylum to a wider sphere of usefulness. Kathie, dear, did you ever meet a tongue like mine before?"

Katharine smiled indulgently.

"I told you I had written to Cassius about the other girl, didn't I? I'm just dying to see the outcome. He wrote back that he had taken my letter to the Lord, and would advise me as to his intentions later. But I don't know whose intentions he meant, his or the Lord's, but of course it comes to exactly the same thing."

"Who is the girl?" asked Katharine.

"A sewing-girl, my dear, the very salt of the earth, with a mother to support and a brother to send to college, and all that Dargey money

just waiting to do it. Oh, I told John all that in my letter, because I wanted him to understand just what would be required of him, besides I knew there was a far better chance for him to fall in love with Mary if affection recommended itself to him as a sort of religious duty. I practically said to him: "John, here's a great work for the Lord waiting to be done—will you do it?" and incidentally I remarked that Mary would be the sweetest, and the prettiest, and the smartest little wife in the county, and that her mother had been a Grantley anyway. Oh, I always meant him to marry Mary Comer when I got through with him."

"Oh, Airlie, Airlie!"

"Yes, but just think what I've done for him, dear. Why, all his ideas about women and the Universe are changed since he first took me to the Lord in prayer. I've done some things for him that Mary could never have done. She's not mean enough. And now he'll know how to appreciate that. He's horribly proud, and I've wounded his pride over and over again. The Dargeys have lived in the same old stone house ever since the flood, and after God and themselves they worship it. Every room was laid out and furnished a hundred years ago according to a beautiful geometrical scheme, and

you mustn't move a chair from its eternally predestined angle lest the heavens fall. I never thought of it before, but I believe the furniture of a period and its theology bear a striking resemblance to each other, and John inherited the furniture, awful, immovable stuff, and the theology, likewise awful, immovable stuff, in all its pristine hideousness, from his ancestors. But I've fixed all that for Mary. I always called the house the Morgue to John, and told him that there were any number of things and ideas in it crying out for burial. Mary will make it a lovely old home when she has judiciously cleared out the hair-cloth horrors, and torn the sacred paper off the walls, and curtained the windows, and pulled down partitions and put up more, and, in fact, scraped the blight of time generally off the interior. Why, Dargey women have lived and died there, and never dared open a particular window because that window never had been opened. But I've changed all that."

After this they sat in the fire-light for a while in happy basking silence, until Whitney said suddenly: "Mother, who is God? I want to know. I mean I want to know really."

"Darling, I don't know," said Katharine, gently. "But I want you to remember all your life, that whenever you hear something beauti-

ful, or see it, or think it, it is because at that moment you are close to the heart of God. Child, there are so many ways of being near to Him." And she repeated slowly, that it might sink deep into the little mind:

"A picket frozen on duty,
A mother starved for her brood,
Socrates drinking the hemlock,
And Jesus on the rood;
The million who, humble and nameless,
The straight hard pathway trod—
Some call it Consecration,
And others call it God."

There was a long silence. Then the boy said: "Mother, I think you're just all right. I mean I think you're better than anybody else in the world."

"So do I, Whit," exclaimed Airlie.

CHAPTER VIII

A FEW days before Christmas Airlie received a letter from her mother which was one of the surprises of her life.

"Why, Katharine," she screamed, "she's coming here for Christmas—here! She says you wrote her the loveliest letter, and that anybody would infer from what you say that I was quite a sweet girl. Oh, what an awful joke for mother. Aunt Betha won't come—bless her heart!—but she says mother must and shall. Mercy on us! Mother says she will greatly enjoy the opportunity to enlarge the somewhat circumscribed horizon of her life by a glimpse into the activities and resources of a wider sphere. Oh, this overwhelms me. The old dearie! She's got all the emotions of starting out on a regular spree, as it were. But what shall we do with her? How did you come to think of such a thing? And just fancy her coming! I must write at once and urge her not to stick her head out of the car window, and to bring a pocket-handkerchief, and check her trunk, and have Aunt Betha or the

minister put her in care of the porter to be turned over to me at the end of the journey C. O. D. Oh, it's simply great. But what made you do it, you precious dear?"

"It was Dr. Regester's idea," said Katharine. "He insisted that she would come. I was so afraid she would be lonely without you."

"Bless that man!" ejaculated Airlie. "He thinks he knows everything."

"I wish I knew what awful thing he has done," said Katharine. "I really thought you would bite his head off on Thursday." Airlie looked gratified. "I think I will ask him about it. With all my penetration, Airlie, I am quite unable to tell whether you like him a great deal or not at all."

"What I like him?—like that man!"

Just then the door opened and the servant announced Dr. Regester. He had become so frequent a visitor of late that they had ceased to observe any particular ceremony with him. Katharine flushed in deep embarrassment; she was sure that he must have caught Airlie's high words. And as he shook hands with her he looked at the girl.

"You meant me, didn't you?"

"Why?"

"Because you said 'that man.' I assure you

it is no element of conceit in me that makes me appropriate the remark, but you have been treating me on the 'that man' basis for some time, haven't you?"

Airlie smiled at him. "Yes."

"But what have I done? Why 'that man'? Please enlighten me."

She leaned her chin on her hand, and regarded him seriously. "I don't know. But it's the way I think of you. You've said such horrid things."

"What things?"

"Oh, you remember quite well. I've thought about it a great deal, and I see that you were quite correct. Of course, it's primarily a business matter. Oh, I've boned the thing right down, and in the last analysis it comes out just as you claim."

"Airlie, what *are* you talking about?" demanded Katharine.

"Listen, dear, and perhaps you'll understand, but I won't promise, because one requires to be educated up to it. Dr. Regester says in substance: Brutes we're born, brutes we live, and brutes we die, leaving a cage full of brutes behind us to keep the Zoo going. And that's all there is to it. Very good. But *I* don't sign any marriage contract on that exalted basis. You don't catch me marrying Mr. A. on any serene

supposition that Miss B. would have suited him equally well. No, indeed! Marriage?" The colour flooded her face, but she held her head high, and looked straight at the young man. "Why, to me it would have to be everything, love, and life, and death, and all eternity. For its sake, I would have to be willing, if need be, to hold my voice forever silent, and count it joy. *That's* my idea of marriage! Sentimental trash, isn't it? Very well, I like such trash, and if it isn't true, much do I care, for I like it better than tons of your scientific stuff that may be true."

She wheeled toward the piano. "Listen! I'm improving. And Signor Vecellio says: 'My child, nevaire, nevaire marry. It is ruin—tam ruin to a voice divine like yours.' Bah! What would I, with my voice, want with one of your rational marriages? I adore my voice."

She began to sing, and, as he listened, Regester, at first critical, grew strangely sympathetic. For he realised that she was not singing now to entertain anyone—she was giving unhampered expression to herself—to her ambitions, her inspirations, her ideals—in the highest form to which she had yet attained. But there was more than that in her song. There was the pain, the protest of the woman—protest against that love

for which she yet longed—the love which, by the inalienable law of its being, seeks ever its own.

Poor little girl! What had the future for her?—a life in which love became conqueror?—in which every quality, feminine, tender, renunciatory, triumphed at the expense of her gifts, her self-development, her rights as a soul without sex?

Or, had it for her the illusion of victory—success achieved, ambition gratified, independence won in a world where men, trained for the conflict, struggled and failed—all this, at the cost of a heart insurgent, unsatisfied?

Poor little girl!

With her fingers barely free from a final crashing chord, Airlie rose, and bowed to her audience. "A marriage of reason," she said, "after that. Reason!" She swept like a queen from the room.

"I sometimes wonder whether the artistic temperament isn't a great curse," said Katharine, meeting the young man's eyes. "Some day, you see, the right man is going to fall in love with Airlie, but she has any number of plans for the future, and the worst of it is, that she has plenty of ability to carry them all out."

"Well, if the right man happens to have a

little career of his own, he'll just have to give it up, and trot around after her like a poodle."

"Yes, that would do nicely," said Katharine, "if she could ever be induced to care for that trotting-poodle sort of man. But unfortunately, she couldn't." She smiled. "It's ridiculous of me to talk like this, isn't it? Perhaps, she'll never want to get married at all, only I know she will, for she has a passion for experience. Many people, to hear her talk, would call her the most sentimental girl they ever met, but, as a matter of fact, she has not a particle of the kind of sentiment they mean about her."

"I daresay," he said, absently. He was no longer thinking of Airie.

At the end of a weary day when his heart was heavy with the weight of sickness and death upon it, it was often a saving experience to him to drop in here, and ease it of its burdens; it seemed to him that he had by the most unconscious gradations arrived at a friendship for Katharine such as many—most—men never knew for their wives. But beyond her he always saw her husband. That she had loved and should still love such a man was inexplicable to him.

A woman's fidelity was a thing difficult of analysis when it was made up, as in this case, of extraordinarily antagonistic qualities. It had

amused him to irritate Airlie by suggesting Katharine's possible marriage, but he knew his friendship safe from such catastrophe. He was quite aware that if Katharine had been other than just what she was, she would by this time have married him, but his pulses had never even quickened to the thought; he understood her too well. Marriage, for the ordinary man, was undoubtedly a discipline in every way desirable, but he was not able to perceive that he was the ordinary man. He knew that the people in Glenedge considered him an easy victim to Miss Casler's charm, but, while he admitted the charm frankly, it was tiring, like the sparkle of the sun on snow. Besides, he knew that he was the very last man in the world for whom such a girl would care, though this point would doubtless have rendered itself open to argument, had he been the sort of man to care for such a girl.

A day or two after this, Airlie and Katharine went into town to meet Mrs. Casler. Airlie was quite excited. "I'll watch on this side of the gate, and you watch on that," she said to Katharine. "And you look out for a tiny little dear with a black silk skirt about ten yards wide, gathered full into the waist, and a very elderly black velvet dolman made out of one of her grand-aunt's wedding gowns—must certainly be

about a hundred and fifty years old—I mean the dolman, or rather the velvet in the dolman, and an enormous black satin bag with her slippers and her Bible and her smelling-bottle, and brush and comb, and towels, and needles, and black and white thread, and nux and aconite, and a mustard plaster, and a lot of First Aid to the Injured directions in case of a railway accident, and peppermints and Brown's troches—never use any other, Kathie—and her night-cap, and just a few clothes in case her trunk is eternally lost, which she knows it will be, and her knitting and a shoe-lace and some sandwiches all bulging out in every direction. Now, do you think you will be able to identify her?"

"I doubt it. In looking out for a mustard plaster I shall fail to perceive the peppermints. You have told me too much. I can only hope you will know her yourself."

"I can't promise," said Airlie. "My dear, here comes the train."

They quickened their steps and reached the gate just as the human tide began sweeping through it as anxiously as if the whole ocean hurried hard after it.

Katharine became at once so absorbed in the search for a black silk skirt ten yards wide, that she quite failed to connect a tiny lady in ob-

trusively modern outfit with her preconceived idea of Mrs. Casler, until she saw her seized by Airlie.

"Why, mother, is that you? No, it isn't. Please pardon my mistake, Madam."

"Oh, but Daughter Airlie, it really is," protested Mrs. Casler, tremulously. She seemed to expect difficulty in proving her identity.

"Well, *perhaps* you are," said Airlie, "but I'm not in the least sure of it. Still, let's take her home, Katharine, and we'll see if she can prove herself up beyond a doubt. Because she doesn't look one bit like my mother, though she does seem to have her head-piece on, and you see she knows my name."

Mrs. Casler looked seriously alarmed, and when they had got her bundled into a cab, she attempted an explanation of her appearance. "It's like this, Niece Katharine. I quite realise that in Windwater the apparel I have worn so many years is considered most appropriate and dignified, but I could not persuade myself that it was a fitting garb for this vast metropolis. It is my desire while I am here to assimilate the spirit of the city, to feel myself, as it were, a homogeneous drop in this mighty sea of human life, and to that end I have——"

"Arrayed yourself according to Butterick,

dear," interposed Airlie, briskly. "Yes, yes, we know just what you mean. But what have you been reading lately, little one? There's an Encyclopædia-of-Universal-Knowledge air about you that's positively maddening. You'll have to take it off and lock it up, or you'll be sandbagged and robbed of it by some aspiring thief. This is a wicked city, dear."

"Dreadful, dreadful!" murmured Mrs. Casler, sadly. "Why, my dears, the statistics——"

"Hush, hush!" Airlie put up her hands in horror. "My dearie, that's a most depraved word. Never let me hear you use it again. People would think all sorts of dreadful things about you."

The little lady looked out of the window in great confusion. What did Daughter Airlie mean when she said those strange things?

When they reached the station they saw that they could just catch the train leaving at the moment for Glenedge, and with scant ceremony Mrs. Casler was tumbled into a car and pushed into a seat, panting. "Daughter Airlie—" she began, indignantly, but breath failed her.

"There, there, dear, don't hurry," said Airlie, patting her attentively on the back. "The engine's doing that, you know. That's what it's for."

"But, my daughter, such unseemly haste. Are there no more trains to-day?"

"To-day, my little mother? Well, I should hope so. Another in five minutes. But city people can't squander the sands of time like that. And now, if I were you, I'd put my bonnet straight. It's all over one ear, and the men are looking at you. Oh dear, Katharine! What shall we do with her? She mustn't look at them in that shy, coquettish way. They'll think she's trying to flirt with them. City men are so naughty, dear. You must be careful."

Mrs. Casler's delicate face flushed crimson. The metropolis, in which she had intended to be so easy a drop, seemed a more precarious waste of waters than she had supposed.

When they reached home, Airlie turned her round and round again, and feasted her eyes on the spectacle. "Well, that I should live to see my mother in such a skirt, and such a coat, and a mink-tail toque—now, mother, don't pretend it's a bonnet—as well call a cat a centipede because they both have legs. Oh, but it's the skirt that captures my senses! Katharine, do look. Now can you call that—ahem! well—decent for a feminine being of sixty?"

"No, dear, sixty-two next August," protested Mrs. Casler, stoutly conscientious.

"Sixty-two—oh, that's awful! Why, I blush to say it, but I can positively see where she's got bones, Kathie."

"Yes, dear, I know. It has given me many anxious moments, but Mrs. Ball said——"

"And hips! Why, Katharine, she's really got them—hips, you know, and I never knew it before. Oh, my mother!"

Mrs. Casler looked the picture of mortification. "Oh, Airlie, really I must explain. I only did it for the sake of pleasing you, my child. I didn't want you to feel ashamed of your little mother. And if you only knew what I've gone through with Betha!"

Airlie first hugged her tenderly, and then executed a little dance of joy. "Aunt Betha? No, I don't know what you suffered, but my imagination's quite equal to knowledge. Oh, you poor little Mummy, to have to face dear sister all alone! Why, you don't know how sweet you look. Pretty—umh! I guess sister was torn with jealousy."

"Indeed, no, Daughter Airlie. She said she prayed about it."

"You bet she did," ejaculated Airlie, fervently. "The madder they are the more they pray, and say so. After all, prayer is a wonderful safety-valve. Any amount of venom goes

safely spouting to the skies, that would otherwise make this world too poisonous to live in."

Airlie allowed her mother to rest a day or two after her exciting five-hour journey, and then the campaign began in earnest. She was taken down town to do some Christmas shopping, but when it became necessary for her to cross State Street, she definitely refused to do so. "No, I will not imperil my life like that, Daughter Airlie, but if you can find a 'bus which is crossing the street, I would get into that."

"And pay a whole fare just for that," said Airlie, severely. "Never!"

"But it would be much cheaper than a funeral, daughter, especially as I should have to be taken back to Windwater. I don't think I told you that Sister Betha and I have done up the lot in the cemetery, and it really looks——"

"Mother, never mind the cemetery lot now. You aren't in it yet. Oh, do come along. Shut your eyes, and I'll do the rest."

Mrs. Casler unexpectedly assented to this arrangement, but when Airlie had got her exactly half way across and just in the middle of a cable-car track, she peeped, and then, with a tiny scream of terror, she firmly braced herself to resist further movement in any direction whatever, and closed her eyes again in prayerful

preparation for her oncoming fate. Airlie was in despair. Just then, however, a gentleman hurrying across perceived her plight, and said, kindly: "May I help you?" Airlie could have whipped her for the docility with which she tripped along by his side, but her indignation was ten times intensified when, in parting, he turned around to her as he lifted his hat, and she recognised Mr. Mackemer. He was at no pains to conceal a slight smile, and she felt sure that he was rejoiced, odiously rejoiced, at having been able to put her under even so slight an obligation.

"Mother!" she panted. "Oh, how could you? I would just like to shake—that lamp-post. Of all things—that horrid man!"

Mrs. Casler looked pained. "Why, Daughter, he was a perfect gentleman. What can you mean?"

"Oh, very perfect! Now, my dear mother, I told you the other day that these men are all bad, and yet you grab the arm of the very first one that comes along."

"Grab? Me grab? Daughter Airlie!"

"Well, now, listen. Next time you cross the street quietly with Airlie, and let Mr. Mackemer do his crossing by himself."

"Mr. Mackemer! What, Niece Katharine's husband?" Mrs. Casler was quite as much over-

come as Airlie desired her to be. Had her escort been the gentleman equipped with horns, hoofs, and tail, she could not have been more deeply shocked. For the rest of the day she was slavishly obedient, but she could not succeed in rallying her thoughts to her shopping again. She eyed every man she met with open distrust, and at last she said, pathetically: "Oh, Daughter Airlie, can't you sit me down somewhere and leave me, and here's my pocket-book, and my list, and you buy the things for all of you, please. I can't think about anything any more, only Niece Katharine and that man, and he looked so nice, and, oh, dear! I touched him!"

Airlie found a quiet nook for her, and when she inspected the list she almost thanked Providence for having sent Mr. Mackemer their way. *Airlie*—one complete set works John Ruskin. One ring.—"Dear Mummy, did she think of having the ring set with the stones of Venice?" *Katharine*—a real lace collar and Balm for a Bruised Heart.—"Now, little mother, the collar's tip-top, and I'm going to get Kathie a stunner, but mercy on us! is the Balm for a B. H. in a book or a bottle? I'll have to try and persuade her that Katharine won't need any balm after she gets the collar, and it certainly seems to me that a little guipure in the

right place would do more for my mind and body than any amount of Ruskin on my book-shelves. Especially as I have that recital next week. Why can't parents and guardians remember that a girl is only twenty once in her life, and that only for twelve short months?"

As a result of this independent shopping, Airlie returned home in spirits which she subdued with difficulty, but Mrs. Casler could not forget the morning's experiences. She had put her niece's husband out of her range of thinking long ago, as one of the depraved things of life upon which a chaste mind did not dwell, and now to have come in actual contact with him!

"You wouldn't believe it to look at her," said Airlie to Dr. Regester that evening, "but mother flirts, oh, awfully! I wish you could have seen her this morning." She had not forgiven the little lady's obstinacy and was still anxious to punish her. Mrs. Casler's face was a study; Airlie had never talked to her like this before—she began to wish for Betha. To be accused of flirting, and before a young man! "Oh, daughter, it was not so. I assure you, sir—" she turned to Regester.

"Now, now, mother, you know you wouldn't, *wouldn't* cross the street with me, but the moment a man, a handsome man, comes along, you

trip away with him as gay as a prize lamb going to the fair with a blue ribbon round its neck."

Mrs. Casler rose, and with all the dignity her small frame could carry left the room. To be likened by her own daughter, before a strange young man, to a prize lamb—it was not to be borne.

"It occurred to me the other day," said Regester, somewhat irrelevantly, "that for a young woman of your striking independence of character men and marriage occupy a very large place in your reflections."

"Why, of course they do," replied Airlie with unblushing candour. "What a monster I should be if they didn't, being in this world and of it as I am. I really don't believe I think about much else, when I'm not singing."

The room echoed with laughter from Katharine and Regester.

CHAPTER IX

MRS. CASLER had never been inside a theatre in her life—she regarded it as a main entrance to perdition, and when she found herself actually witnessing a dramatic performance, it became necessary that she should almost be held in her chair by main force at times. Her soft blue eyes were hot with indignation. How could Airlie—but no! Airlie was an enigma to her—a girl who talked as she did—but Katharine, the niece with whom she felt herself in such sympathy, how could she endure listening to such dreadful things? She looked in bewilderment at their unmoved faces—was it possible that they did not realise the import of what was taking place before them—was she, then, more versed in the knowledge of vice than all these calm, smiling people about her? She blushed miserably.

As far as Katharine was concerned, the play and the emotional intensity of the actress made no impression on her. This was not suffering as

she knew it; it was merely a study of thwarted passion, and as such had no appeal for her, and the whole thing suffered from a comic effect, due to the little side-shows of which Mrs. Casler was leading lady. It was impossible not to smile at the sight of her, sitting motionless as a doll, with tightly closed eyes, until curiosity conquering scruple, she would furtively open them, to stare in horror at the scene on the stage. However, it was a benefit performance, and there was room for hope that before its conclusion the little lady would see something that she could enjoy. But this was by no means certain, nor was Airlie at all anxious for it, for she derived the most unholy glee from her mother's sufferings.

The girl had, however, a very serious anxiety on hand, for to her dismay she had discovered Mackemer, far across the crowded house, to be sure, but she felt an agony of fear lest some subtle force should reveal him to Katharine, as she saw that his opera-glass veered again and again to his wife's face. She glanced at her jealously, critically, and her heart was glad, for she was sure that Katharine had never looked so sweet, so strangely appealing in her life before. A second youth seemed to be coming upon her in these days, but it had the mellow charm of time and experience about it, beside which the exuberant

gayety of youth seemed crude and too highly coloured.

Regester sat next to Katharine, and Airlie drew away from them, her little head suddenly full of deep schemes. She wished the man across the way to understand that she was not the point of attraction. She felt very wise as she reflected that men admired a woman often in proportion to the admiration of other men for her.

She looked at her mother's baby face harrowed into deep ridges of distress over the painted and powdered passions on the stage in front of them—how little she realised the terrible currents in the lives about her, and yet the little Dresden-china lady thought she had *lived* all these years on the shelf at Windwater. Yes, with the emotions of a marionette.

After the performance was over and they were hurrying away, Mrs. Casler discovered that she had dropped her fan. Without saying anything, she tripped back, and during a despondent effort to discover the seats they had just vacated she encountered a gentleman who most kindly aided her in her search. When at last they had found the fan, he inquired how she had enjoyed the evening.

"Oh, very much, very much indeed," she palpitated—"except—except the dancing young

ladies' dresses. I am sure they must have been cold, and really, I don't think—" Oh, he looked such a nice, fatherly man; she was sure he must be the manager. "Oh, their dresses were so—so, why, quite like pen-wipers, you know." Her distress was refreshingly genuine.

"Madam, believe me," the gentleman said, impressively, "it shall never occur again."

She shook hands with him, murmuring rapturous thanks over his manly grasp, and then ran into the arms of Airlie.

"Mother, where have you been? Oh, what a fine fright you have given us! Why, I wonder you weren't kidnapped. And who was that man, I should like to know?"

"Oh, Daughter Airlie, such a nice man—a perfect gentleman, and he assured me that it should never occur again, dear. I just mentioned the dresses, you know—quite pen-wipers, I said. It was my opportunity and my duty, and he saw at once that I was correct."

"Oh, and he assured you that it should never occur again! Adelaide Airlie Casler, you're surely the loneliest thing on earth this night. An hour-old infant is blasé in comparison. Didn't he ask you to join the show? Well, he missed the chance of his life, but he's a genius, anyway."

That night the troubled little mother had a

long talk with Katharine about her daughter. "I'm so distressed, Niece Katharine. In my day young girls were different. She seems to know so—so many things. I cannot think it right. I spoke to her the other day most seriously, and, really, she argued the matter with me in a way that was quite—quite indelicate. I do not see any future for the home if girls have such ideas as Airlie. She has no reverence—no respect even for—for——"

"The men?" suggested Katharine, with a smile.

"Why, my dear, the way she talks to that young doctor! It is terrible. To hear her discuss marriage with him——"

"Well, why shouldn't she?" asked Katharine. "Airlie does know a great many things, which perhaps—you didn't, but she has the sweetest mind; it is not capable of an unlovely thought. And why shouldn't she discuss marriage, and why should she reverence the men? We have got beyond that, Aunt Adelaide. She will marry—there is no question of that, and think of the responsibility that rests upon her in the choosing of a husband. Now suppose that you and I had, after we are through with the life we are living here, to live through another on very much the same basis, but suppose that the choosing of

our parents for that next life should devolve upon us here. Why, it would be an awful affair. I have often thought of that. It seems to me that a great many people would end in refusing to be born at all. Oh, we know lots of nice people, but as parents! Yet, without any conscience whatever we foist upon innocent children parentage from which they would shrink in horror if they had any choice. A girl's marriage is settled in the most haphazard way—oh! perhaps, after all, that is best—I don't know." Katharine threw out her hands with a weary gesture. "If all the sweetest girls married the finest men, there would be no leavening of the human lump, would there? But don't worry about Airlie. Why, her ideal of marriage is absolutely lovely. Can't you see what lies beneath in the sweet heart of her?"

But Mrs. Casler shook her head. What a strange woman Niece Katharine was! Had she, after all, really cared for her husband? How she would like to know. But could she risk a remark?—the temptation became irresistible.

"Oh, my dear," she said, tremulously, leaning forward and laying her hand on Katharine's, "I have seen him."

"Seen whom?" Katharine drew herself away coldly.

"Why, why, your husband, my dear. But I didn't know him. You heard Airlie speak of it. She was very angry. He helped me across the street."

Katharine sat quite still.

"If I had only known!" twittered the little lady. "But I had no idea. And he seemed so kind. Quite a nice man."

There was a silence; then Katharine said, steadily: "But how did you know it was he?"

Mrs. Casler felt encouraged to be expansive. "Oh, Daughter Airlie has seen him. She and Whitney met him in the restaurant. Why, he actually talked to them."

"He saw Whitney?"

"Oh, yes, my dear, and he has seen you."

The colour rushed into Katharine's face. "Seen me?" she repeated, in an intense tone.

"Oh, yes, Niece Katharine, at the theatre, this evening. Daughter Airlie saw him. She sees everything, you know." Mrs. Casler hesitated. Then she added, daringly: "He looked at you, oh, so much! It doesn't seem right. Daughter Airlie should have said something—made some excuse. He should have gone away." The little lady was by now in a buzz of excitement. "You see, Niece Katharine, he looked at you all the evening."

Katharine rose up. "Good-night, Aunt Adelaide," she said, in a strange voice. "I'm so tired." But in the door-way she paused, and looked back over her shoulder, with a wonderful smile in her eyes. "Good-night, little Aunt," she said again, "sweet dreams!"

"What a strange woman!" thought Mrs. Casler. "What a most peculiar woman. Why, all these people are peculiar. It's very strange. What would Betha think?"

Alone in her room, Katharine turned on the lights until her dressing-table blazed. She was suddenly afraid of the darkness, of the loneliness, of this strange mood which had captured her in a moment. What did it mean—this whirl of blood in her veins, this consciously reckless defiance of her long self-control, this luxury of unsealed sweetness stealing like incense from her heart to her brain? Ah, she knew well what lay back in her mind, but not for worlds would she have risked its destruction in words. No, for this brief moment of bliss she would give herself a willing fool to the play of her own emotions; she would lie to her soul, if need be, if she might but cheat the gray death in her heart of its dominion there, and throne in its stead the maddest delusion for which a woman's pathetic fate ever fashioned crown.

The memory of her husband in moments of rapture long past came back upon her with overwhelming force; she closed her eyes that she might yield herself utterly to the spell of his imaged presence. She felt again the charm of his deep-blue eyes upon her—her lips thrilled to his unforgotten touch as she proffered him her wasting treasures in a reckless passion such as she had never known in the days of delicate reserve when he and she had been husband and wife together. The colour came flushing into her pale cheeks—her pulses throbbed tumultuously. Ah! if she but had him now for one magnificent moment, she would defy him to resist the tempest in her heart. A boundless contempt for the pallid affection of her serene young wifehood took possession of her—now, for the first time, as it seemed to her, she grasped the whole meaning of that maddening mystery called love, and her nature expanded like a tropical flower beneath the fierce blaze of the noonday sun. Love—it was night and day, spirit and flesh, heaven and hell, good and evil in splendid perpetual bond.

Dr. Regeater? The thought of him crossed her heart like a shadow. How many times she had realised that a look or a word from her would wreck the barriers which rose between

them, and sometimes, indeed, she had wished passionately that it was in her to love him, but she had found it impossible to deceive herself—she had no interest in setting fire to his affections. She was satisfied with his friendship, but she was not the dupe of it that he was; she had reached the age when a wise woman is no longer the sport of illusion, but merely of that knowledge of good and evil which is infinitely more treacherous. She knew very well that he had deluded himself into believing that what he felt for her was the finest type of friendship, whereas it was but an unrecognised interest in her affections. If only she could love him, how it would straighten the tangled skein of her life, but no!—with an impatient gesture she dismissed him from audience in her heart.

And immediately, as if in retribution, there rose before her a face framed in reddened hair, fair with the tinting of a sea-caressed shell, with sweet, scarlet lips, and eyes which hid their witchery beneath long, narrow lids, white as a lily's petal. Ah! the pain in her heart broke fiercely through the iron crust of her control—a bitter moan escaped her. That she should have sat there dreaming of his return to her like a fool, when perhaps at this moment—! With a desperate movement she rose and turned out the

blazing lights; such agony as this demanded darkness for its battle-field. So unconscious was she of everything but her pain, that it was a long time before she realised that there had begun in her one of those supreme struggles for her husband's soul which seemed occasionally to seize her in relentless grip. Was the carnal the only cult that yet appealed to him, to Clifford, with his noble possibilities of high ideal, of lofty endeavour? She recoiled with horror from the experience through which she had but just passed—the hot breath of the flesh had scorched her, and she had bent herself exultantly to the blaze. What better was she, then, than her poor, tempted Clifford? The mystery of love became again in one clear, white moment the old unsolved problem of the spirit. "Oh, God!" she moaned. "I only want him to be good. I ask for nothing more."

Was she honest? She knew she was not, and the tears poured over her face in a terrible flood. If he became good, if the spiritual at last developed in him, he was bound to return to her. Was that the great basis of her desire for his redemption?

Ah, it was cruel to put the question to her like that, but bitterly as she fought it, passionately as she denounced it, there was forced in upon her

steadily, inevitably, the great fact that for a life redeemed there had somewhere been a self renounced. Renunciation—it lay deep at the root of all human uplift.

The relentless sands of time slipped steadily through the dark glass of destiny, while she drank her cup to its cruellest dreg. She saw it all clearly, brutally—her mutilated life outstretching before her in loneliness which should never have end; he could never again be hers, never. The extent of her high privilege was to be that, loving him, she might—must—suffer for him, apart from him. No repentance could bring him back to her again in the sweetness, the rapture of reunited love. For her there was to be never other than the cloistered life, the altar of sacrifice, the smothered cry of the heart denied its most exquisite flowering and fruitage. *Why?* If he wanted to return to her, if she longed to forgive him, what dared separate them?

She quivered like a frail leaf in some awful storm as the answer to that defiant question came crashing down upon her. All the tremendous majesty and might of righteousness in the Universe would stand between them. *Why?* Because of that fact of sin which could never be wiped away.

“Oh, God,” she whispered at last, with white

lips, "I will give him up. He is not mine. But make him good. Clifford, Clifford!"

She leaned forward in the darkness, listening. It seemed to her that in that intense silence, after this, her last sacrifice, she *must* hear the first feeble fluttering of his soul toward the light. A long time afterward she went to the window and threw it open to the glory of the calm winter night. The silent immensity of the sky soothed her, and appealed to thoughts that far outran the limits of her earthly course; the things of time were obliterated, and every burning star seemed to flash to her from countless ages the message to endure, to fight the good fight, to suffer, to renounce, to love like God.

CHAPTER X

“**O**H, dear!” sighed Whitney, “I do wish Santa Claus would bring me a watch to-day.”

“A watch!” exclaimed Airlie. “What business has such a little boy as you to be thinking about a watch?”

“Why, Cousin Airlie, a boy just can’t *help* thinking about a watch. Mr. Page has a lovely one for five dollars, and I’ve got six. I think I’ll get it.”

“Well, do as you like, dear. It’s your own money, and at any rate you’ll get experience.”

“Well, Cousin Airlie,” said the child, in his slow, old-fashioned way, “isn’t experience what I need more than anything else?”

Airlie laughed. “Yes, dear. But when you’re as old as I am you’ll have found out that it’s one of the things we may need badly, but are much less blue without.”

“Of course, if I didn’t buy the watch, I could give Reg Brown three dollars for his gym-i-nasium ticket. They’re poor, you know. He

washes the dishes, and their spoons aren't thoroughbred. I told Mrs. Brown the other day I'd come in and help any time they were pushed—it's such a big family, Cousin Airlic. They don't seem to have much of anything except babies. So, of course, Reg can't have a gym-i-nasium ticket. That Y. M. C. A. must make lots of money. Three dollars for every little boy's ticket!"

"Oh, no, Whit. It's not a money-making institution at all."

"No? I suppose it's what you would call a godly-making institution, Cousin Airlic. And that's just what Reg Brown needs, for he isn't such a very good boy. He used to swear a good deal, but I talked to him quite a little about Satan, and he's doing much better. But Mr. Brown is such a sweary man himself, and a boy likes to be like his father, you know."

"I dare say," said Airlic, hurriedly, and changed the subject. She had described Katharine's Christmas dinner-table as being recruited from the highways and hedges, for, in addition to Whitney's forlorn young school-teacher and the seamstress, Regester was to bring with him a medical friend who, as he told Katharine, was "living the life" in one of the most god-forsaken quarters of the city. "Though," as he added,

"Reynolds would object to my saying that. He would protest that nothing can be god-forsaken. It is simply man-forsaken."

"Living the life!" exclaimed Airlie. "What on earth does that mean?"

"Perhaps you'll know when you see him," replied Regester. "He belongs to what he calls the Brotherhood of One. He will affiliate only with himself, because he believes that the letter of organization kills the spirit. As soon as a man feels that he is part of a machine, his sense of responsibility weakens. Once, in a time of great stress, he showed me his dedication, as he calls it, for he holds that the soul must put its vision on record, lest it forget. He is a monk of a new type, without vow, without creed, without faith, but with a devotion to all that is noblest that just sweeps you off your feet. But on the outside you might mistake him for an ordinary man. Don't."

"I didn't like to ask Dr. Regester," said Katharine to Airlie afterward, "but I suppose this Dr. Reynolds had taken a vow of celibacy to himself. So I hope you'll bear that in mind, dear, and act accordingly."

"Act how?" asked Airlie. Her blue eyes danced with mischief. "A celibate man," she repeated. "What a nice, nice thing! I know I

shall like him. But, mother, dear!" she raised her voice. "You simply must not flirt with the young man who's coming to-day. Kathie wished me to give you the hint."

Mrs. Casler showed serious signs of fermentation, and Katharine protested, but the door-bell rang.

Naturally, at the dinner-table, Airlie immediately appropriated the conversation. "We had several tons of coal put in yesterday," she remarked, "and, of course, those teamster men splashed it all over, and then pretended they had picked it up. The lawn looked a sight, but I hadn't any time to go out and pick it up, and Katharine isn't a bit handy about little things like that."

"What about Whitney?" asked Regester.

"Whitney? Why, bless my heart! he's a boy. And don't you know that a boy is a being devoted to physical development solely by artificial exercise? He was never intended to be used. It was different in my day," sighed Airlie, with a sweep of her eye in her mother's direction. "We didn't allow children to waste the golden moments of life in the idle frivolity of play then. Little girls cut whole cloth into scraps and sewed them together again, and little boys picked potato bugs and sprouted toward greatness with the sweat

of honest toil upon their brows. They sweat just the same now, but the sweat is purely decorative. There's no money in it for anybody. In fact, when you consider the outfits they require to sweat in, it's a distinctly extravagant luxury. Oh, I'll admit there are a few boys left who still work, because, while I was watching that disorderly coal out of my window, up skipped a dirty little half-clothed imp and began hustling the lumps into a sack. All the time he kept an anxious eye on the house, he was so afraid he'd be caught. That was what bothered me. I wanted him to have the coal, for he looked as if he hadn't been warm since last August, but I wanted him to steal it happily. What business has a cold, hungry child with a conscience?"

"I see," said Dr. Reynolds. "You felt that the wrong lay not in the act, but only in his belief that the act was wrong."

"Yes. It seemed to me that he had a perfect right to steal. The only outrage was in his knowing he was stealing."

"You thought that if he had only been less moral, he would really have been more so."

"Yes. Oh, I got badly tangled arguing the question. I felt as if I was watching a problem that ended by involving the entire social and moral dispensation of the Universe."

"You were."

Airlie made a gesture of despair. "Why, just think! The boy was only eight years old, I dare say. It was probably a case of steal or freeze. Now, don't you think that in the face of such necessity as that, whoever taught him that it was wrong to steal committed a crime against him?"

"How do you know that anyone taught him that? And do you think that it is only the comfortable in this world who have a right to a moral code?"

"I do," said Airlie, stoutly.

Dr. Reynolds smiled suddenly. He was a plain man, flaxen, blue-eyed, irregular-featured, but his smile was transforming. In it and in his voice there was a spell of benediction. "Then your little Arab would not only be cold and hungry, but you would deny him any share in that life of the spirit that you yourself treasure as your greatest possession."

Airlie crimsoned. "Ah, I never thought of it from that side. That is a new idea to me. But you can't think how honestly worried I was. I felt that unless I could free that child's conscience, the thought of him would haunt me forever. I was afraid to call to him. I knew he'd run. But my window was open a bit, and I picked

up a box of sweets I had bought for Whitney and tied a string about it, and quickly lowered it to the ground. I knew his curiosity would hold him. Just as it touched the ground I called out: 'It's for you. Merry Christmas, boy!' Then I looked out at him. He took off his hat to me and pointed silently to his sack of coal. 'It's all right,' I said. 'We like you to have it.' Then I threw down a dollar to him, for I remembered that sweets are not a sustaining article. Of course, you will laugh at me, and think I acted very foolishly—" she turned to Regester—"you think I haven't a serious thought, that I am just a silly little singing girl." Her tone revealed a sudden, strangely troubled depth.

"He!" ejaculated Dr. Reynolds, looking from Airlie to Regester. "Why, Miss Casler, he is of all men the one who does the most irrational things. As far as you are concerned, I am certain you could not have done more wisely with the boy than you did. But Regester—" he made an exclamation with his fine, artistic hands—"why, he would have thrown up the window and offered to pay the boy's way through college."

There was a shout of laughter at this, and then Airlie said, turning a critical eye upon Regester.

"Ah, I see! This is quite a new light upon your character."

"Oh, I can tell you lots about him," said Reynolds, looking with unaffected fondness at his chum. "But you surely don't mean to say that he poses out here as a sensible man? I could not have believed in such duplicity."

"Sensible!" echoed Airlie. "You'd suppose he had the exclusive monopoly of all the sense there is. His idea is to make one feel like a paper butterfly. And he succeeds. When I'm through with Vecellio I'm going to emigrate to a desert island where there aren't any problems—nothing but sea and stones and sky."

"No men at all?" asked Regester.

"Not one. Nothing but birds, and beasts, and flowers."

"But wouldn't the men inevitably be included in that list—from your standpoint, I mean?"

Airlie ignored him. But presently he asked: "And when will you be through with Vecellio?"

"Apparently he will soon be through with me. He says the avengers of blood have nearly tracked him to his lair, and that some morning I shall come and find him weltering gloomily in great wads of fatal gore."

"But, Airlie, what is it really all about?" inquired Katharine.

"My dear, I can't think. Sometimes I'm tempted to believe that he really did murder somebody. I quite hope he did, for his character poetically demands murder somewhere in his career, in order to be consistent."

"Daughter Airlie," protested Mrs. Casler, "how can you say such things?"

"Because I've had so much more experience with the devil and Vecellio than you have, dearie," said Airlie, sweetly.

As the girl had remarked to Katharine that morning, she was dressed "to slay," and certainly her executioner's robes became her well. Her gown was a dainty little gray embroidered grenadine, edged about the pretty, round throat with purple velvet pansies. The man from the slums looked at her with glad eyes and loved her as he would have loved any other creation still clean and sweet from the hand of God.

"Of course you know," said Airlie gayly to the school-teacher, "that Dr. Regester is working to get out a patent on a marriage scheme. It's like this. There's to be a State examining board to pair off all the young people according to the condition of their lungs and teeth. Instead of everybody going up to Jerusalem to be taxed we'd all go to the Court-house to be fitted to a mate, and the doctors would rake in the tax. Oh,

it's a great scheme. Would there be no chance for an appeal from the decision of the board?" She looked gravely at Regester.

"Certainly not," he answered, emphatically. "But as the system would not be in force on a desert island inhabited by only one woman, you have no occasion to worry."

"I won't say a thing to you for ten minutes," said Airle, with a great appearance of offence, and she began at once an argument with the seamstress on the Pope's Soliloquy, a Browning Club being that little woman's chosen form of dissipation after the long, weary days of needle in, needle out. She had inherited a soul athirst for beauty from a father who was slowly dying of cancer through an eternity of agony. Her mother was an excellent woman—and aware of it. Perhaps but for Browning the girl's soul would have died within her.

After dinner was over a solemn procession was formed, headed by Whitney, which proceeded to the drawing-room with stately step, but once there the boy capered madly about the tree, of which this was his first glimpse. Airle went to the piano and sang, "God rest you, merry gentlemen," and then the dismantling of the tree began.

"Oh, Mrs. Mackemer, how could you!" ex-

claimed the school-teacher. She looked at the treasures in her lap with wet eyes, and through the mist of happy tears her face struck Katharine for the first time as pretty. She was glad that she had yielded to the temptation of a giddy silk blouse for the drab-coloured girl. Sympathy and blue silk might make a new creature of her yet.

The seamstress said nothing. She had propped up a picture of the Christ intended for her father in front of her, and was looking at it with deep, visioning eyes. There was no face visible; the artist had hidden it in wonderful suffering hands, but the majesty of the figure inspired.

"Now, is everything off the tree, dears?" called Airlie. "Have you all had what you deserve? No, wait—here's something more for Whitney."

The child took the package and untied the string, letting the stiff white paper flutter to the floor. Inside a cardboard box was a dark-blue leather case, with his initials in gold upon it.

"What can it be, Cousin Airlie? Oh, where is mother?"

"I don't know, dear." The girl's heart cramped intuitively.

Whitney opened the case slowly and peeped in. Then he shut it sharply, as if the sudden glory were more than he could bear.

"Cousin Airlie," he whispered—"Cousin Airlie, it's a watch—a—watch—a gold watch."

Then in his excitement he marched for a moment, speechless, up and down the long room.

The two men watched him, reminiscent.

"It's the greatest moment in a boy's life," said Reynolds. "He will never grow too old to remember it."

"The question is, will he ever be as happy again?" suggested Regester.

"But who gave it to me?" asked Whitney, when he felt able to speak. He opened the case again, and touched the treasure with a reverent finger. Beneath it lay a tiny card, which he drew out and read with difficulty. He asked help of no one.

The colour flew into his young face; his lip began to quiver. Then he laid the watch back, but he kept the card, and, walking over to the fire, he threw it into its blazing depths, strange, unconscious imitator of his mother in the past. Then, gravely, with unhurrying step, he walked out of the room. The whole scene was a fine foreshadowing of the man that was in the making.

"Ah, the trail of the serpent!" said Regester, softly.

"But what a child!" mused Reynolds. "How did such a man as his father come to have such a son as that?"

"Ah, you forget the mother."

"No, I don't. But to put it differently—how did she come to give that child such a father?"

"Ah, you don't know the father."

Reynolds laughed. "This thing appears to move in a circle," he said.

"It does." Regester might criticise Katharine's weakness himself; he would rather defend Mackemer than permit his friend occasion to do so.

"Go and talk to Miss Wing," said Airlie to Regester, peremptorily. "I want to have Dr. Reynolds all to myself for a while. She's in the library with mother."

"Where's the seamstress?" he asked, weakly. "I think I'd rather entertain her."

"I saw you watching her out of the window hurrying back to her father just two minutes ago," said Airlie, severely. "I think you'll enjoy Miss Wing, which is more than you deserve."

"But I sha'n't. I'd much rather stay with you and Reynolds."

But Airlie held the door open authoritatively,

and Regester went. Then she settled herself near Reynolds, her little hands clasped on her lap, her crossed feet swinging lightly above the floor. She had a determined preference for high chairs, possibly the result of a clever appreciation of the value of accenting her style.

"Now talk," she said, coseily.

"About what?" asked Reynolds, with his open smile. He found the child enchanting.

"Why, about that man, of course," she said, pointing in the direction of Regester's retreat. "He interests me."

After Whitney was once clear of the drawing-room he broke from his dignified gait into a rush for his mother. He found her in her room, looking out of the turret window over the wild waste of winter stretching white through the shivering bit of wood before the house, down to the fettered waves of the wide lake. But she saw nothing; she only felt the mysterious chill. She held out her hand to him silently, and he ran to her with a little cry. Yet he said nothing, and it was only after a long time that she ventured, tremblingly: "Whit, what is it? Tell me, darling."

"I'm troubled, mother. Just troubled." There was a terrible patience in the little voice.

After that, a long silence again. She could not trust herself to speak. A tear fell, as she thought,

unnoticed, but it fell deep into the child's life. He made no effort to comfort her; he was too pitifully wise for that. But when at last he spoke it was with the appalling unreserve of overlong repression, and Katharine quailed before the revelation of an anger she had never suspected hidden in her child. "There's a watch downstairs, mother. I don't want it. There was a card, too. I burnt it. Papa is nice outside, but he isn't nice inside. He lives with that lady that we went to see once. They call her Mrs. Mackemer, too, and I wish I had another name. I wish Papa had never been our papa. There isn't another boy in this town with a father like that. I'm 'shamed he's mine."

She had had so many bitter moments. But none as bitter as this; when she saw her child's stern young righteousness in revolt against his father's sin. And what must he not have heard and suffered ever to reach this pass?

"But, mother, how could he have another wife? Why, you're his wife. I couldn't change mothers. Why, mother, a boy's mother belongs to him. Don't you know that? Then why didn't Papa belong to us—to stay belonged, I mean? How could another lady take him away from us? Did he marry that lady?"

Katharine barely nodded assent. She felt like

an imprisoned soul bound within the frozen lake outside.

"Just like he married you, mother?"

She roused at last. "No, Whit, not like he married me." Her heart leaped across the chasm of the years, she saw her child a man, stormed by temptation, perhaps, driven hither and thither, bent to the blast. No, no! Into him she would pour the stern stuff of resistance.

"Listen, Whit! There are always people in the world ready to make us believe that what is wrong is right. But you will know it is wrong, because in our hearts we always know the truth; but you will want, perhaps, to believe what they tell you. Whit, unless you listen then to what it is in you that says *NO*, you will be lost. Perhaps it will be just some little thing at first; but, darling, don't ever be afraid of being good in little things. You know the law says it is all right for your father to marry that other lady. You and I know better, Whit. And in his heart, so does your father."

"Then law is a bad, bad thing," said the boy, stormily.

Katharine was silent awhile. Then she said: "I think it's like this, Whit. The laws by which we try to govern others must always be

lower than the laws by which we govern ourselves. See, dear. We make a law against stealing, which no doubt prevents many people from doing that. But it is not because you are afraid of being put in jail that you don't steal."

"Oh, no, mother." Instinctively the child drew himself up.

"Well, there it is, dear. Don't you see that you have the law within you that governs you? It is nothing outside. But many people have smothered the voice of that law inside. They will not listen to it. And to save them from harming each other, men make coarse, common rules which we all agree must be obeyed. That is law, and it is often as good as it can be. But listen, Whit—" her eyes filled with sudden tears—"don't you see what a terrible thing it is when a man who has known of that inner law and obeyed it—when he tosses it aside and chooses to be governed by the rules which cannot make men good, but which just save them from being what we call bad?"

"Like Papa, you mean."

Katharine did not answer at once. She gathered the child close to her, and they sat in silence watching the white lake and the solemn line of trees sink out of sight in the dusk. Then at last she said, softly: "Poor Papa!"

But Whitney was not to be appeased. "No, mother, he's a bad man."

She laid her finger on his lip. "He has made an awful mistake, Whit."

But the boy's sharp wits were at work. "No, mother, if Mr. Gray had done that you would call him a bad, bad man."

A deep flush came into Katharine's face. "Yes, Whit, but it was not Mr. Gray. It was my husband. It was your father—the father of my boy. Why, Whit, how could I hate him? How could I call him bad? I loved him, and love must be willing to bear everything—sorrow and humiliation and pain and death—and not cry out. Else it were not love, Whit!"

"Oh, mother, mother!" murmured the child. He stroked her cheek with a quivering hand.

"Come, dears!" called Airlie's sweet treble outside. "I'm coming in. That man Reynolds has nearly talked me to death. My ears are aching." She bustled into the room and lit the gas, but turned it suspiciously low. "And Dr. Regester has been flirting with Miss Wing disgracefully. I'd never have sent him off to her if I'd supposed he was going to enjoy himself so. Look, Whit! I brought up your watch. Those men say it's such a perfect beauty that I didn't think it safe to leave it near them. And here's a

bit of black silk cord that I found, that will do for a chain until we get something better."

There were the most saving reaches of common-sense in Airlie's character. "I'm simply not going to have that watch laid aside to be a misery to Katharine and Whit," she had resolved. "Boys are boys, and watches are watches, and they're both meant to work together for the enjoyment of boys, the destruction of watches, and the support of watch-makers. That dear child honestly thinks he doesn't want to touch the thing, but it's ag'in' human nature to keep them apart."

She looked at the watch with a disparaging eye. "It ought to have your name in it, but I don't for a moment suppose it has. Let's look."

That was fatal. For the rest of the all-too-brief day Whitney sat and looked at the treasure in his hand. Its tick was such music to his ears as they had never heard.

"I've shut those two men up in the library with the box of cigars I bought for them," continued the girl, "and told them that if they dared to laugh at them I'd never, never! But they can't, you know, because I got Mr. Morse to buy them for me. Then I gave them a good lecture on the evils of smoking and left them to destroy them-

selves morally, mentally, and physically, with a good conscience."

By this time Katharine could laugh. "Airlie, if you carry on so, Dr. Reynolds will certainly fall in love with you."

"No, he won't. I discovered that five minutes after I met him. I wish he would. To hear you talk, Kathie, one would suppose whole regiments of men had been laying themselves at my feet ever since I cast my youthful shadow across this city. Whereas not one mortal man has signified a desire to make me his ownest own. It's discouraging. Naturally as sensible a girl as I am has not the least desire to get married, but I do wish the creatures would evince some eagerness to marry me. I've noticed this, dear. All the men admire me tremendously, but they stick fast at admiration, and there's nothing satisfying to the soul in that. I see plainly that I shall be driven to reconsider John Cassius."

Airlie prolonged her chatter until she saw that Katharine was quite herself again, and then they went downstairs to find Mr. Randolph, "the washerlady's husband," as Whitney styled him, waiting with a diminutive Randolph for the Christmas tree which Katharine had arranged should be passed on to them with all its ornaments and a fresh array of packages. "A merry

Christmas, Henry!" shouted Whitney, and the diminutive Randolph, with eyes bulging upon the glories of the tree, answered, succinctly: "My, but ain't it!"

"That man's a saint," said Airlie to Regester a few days later. He had dropped in to pay what he excused as a "party call."

"What man?"

"What man? How can you ask? There is only one. I've done nothing but think about him ever since. His whole life is in his face."

"Oh! You think him handsome?"

"Handsome?"

"I thought you only liked handsome men."

"I don't like them—I adore them—if they're only handsome enough. Kathie, come here," she called out. "Dr. Regester is going to tell us all about Dr. Reynolds."

"I'm not," he protested.

"Oh, yes, for I want to ask dozens of things," said Airlie, calmly. "Of course, he's a man of manias. Anyone can see that, after they know it."

"Manias!" grumbled Regester. "Well, I should say so. He's a flower fiend, for one thing."

"A flower fiend?"

"Yes. Thinks the slums can be regenerated

by lily-bulbs and geranium roots, and all sorts of flower-pot folly. He only has three wretched little rooms, and the one that does manage to get some healthy sunlight is sacred to the greatest outfit of tomato-cans you ever laid eyes on. It's an entire conservatory, with a couple of capacious rocking-chairs in it, and some birds, too, and when he thinks that someone needs a "message" badly, he just takes the "case" in there and sits it down among the flowers and leaves it alone. Everything blooms for him. A broom-handle would if he wanted it to. He says his plants all know him."

"Ah, but this does melt my heart of stone!" exclaimed Airlie. "Mother, would you have any objection to my renting the suite of rooms next to his in the tenement and going into the gardening business, too?"

"Daughter Airlie!" protested Mrs. Casler, in alarm. "I disapprove of the idea."

"You mean the regeneration of the wicked, I suppose," said Regester, mildly. "Well, that's what I tell Reynolds. Naturally those people were planted where the Power that makes for righteousness undoubtedly intended them to stay. But that is not Reynolds's way of looking at it. He contends that every human being, no matter how low, loves beauty, and that there's no

way of bringing it so quickly and directly into the lives of the outcast as by giving them a growing thing to care for. Last fall, when the parks threw out their plants, it took him days of work to get all the stuff into his cans for the children who brought them to him. But he told me the other day that he knew a whole family that was being surely uplifted by a row of wretched little geranium shoots on their window-sill, and he's got the worst bully in the court madly interested in a debilitated azalea that he rescued. I wish you could have seen his face when he said to me: 'Regester, Marlow's azalea is full of red buds.' You see, he's a hopeless idealist. To him the blooming of that flower meant a redeemed life. But he doesn't believe in teaching them anything about religion."

"Ah, I thought not," said Mrs. Casler, severely.

"Except in parables," added Regester. "Wasn't there somebody else who taught like that?"

Katharine smiled tenderly; there was a mist in Airlie's eyes. But Mrs. Casler felt as if somebody had been using improper language.

"But all that kind of thing is dreadfully subversive of law and order in the long run," continued Regester, in his deep, quiet voice. "You

see, when these miserable people get a red geranium blooming they get an idea that it needs the sunshine. So they clean the window pane. After a bit they aren't contented with that, and they clean the whole window. Then it strikes them that the room looks dirty, and they clean that, too. Then they take to cleaning themselves. Then they get hankering after clean air and all sorts of improper decencies in the workshops. They aren't satisfied with anything any more, and I tell Reynolds it's all his fault. His tomato cans are a source of inestimable evil. The upper classes are finally disturbed and worried by them, as the Power that makes for righteousness never intended his pets to be. Dividends suffer, and all sorts of outrages occur."

"You're quite right about that," said Mrs. Casler, earnestly. "There's no contenting these people after you once begin giving way to them."

CHAPTER XI

AFTER Christmas winter set in with unrelenting severity; Mackemer shivered sometimes when he wondered what that little boy of his was doing out in the quiet house on the lake shore. Few men, he reflected, would have left the mother in such undisturbed possession of the child. Often, as he sat and smoked his dreamy after-dinner cigar, his mind was busy with the boy's future, and in that shaping of it in which he longed to play the part of master of the clay. Ah, he would not always be content to remain thus alien to his son's life; he felt that more and more.

And then, suddenly, one afternoon the rapid routine of his office work was unhinged by the discovery among his mail of a letter in Katharine's writing. He set the envelope up on his desk and looked at it vaguely, with a dull impression that that must be all there was of it. It was a distinct hand, not to be confounded with any other, and he traced the little peculiarities of style just as he had done long ago, when every

least variation from the manner of the common herd served but to throne her high above it in his ardent estimation.

He took up the letter, and felt it with a strange thrill. What could it possibly be about? Money? Oh, no. Aside from the question of her pride, he was assured that she was saving steadily. Katharine was not a reckless woman, and personal display had no appeal for her. His brow contracted as he recalled certain episodes in connection with his own domestic finances. Isabel had a genius for extravagance, and, though she made some money by her singing, that merely operated as an excuse for further outlay; she was always buying beautiful things which she assured him she paid for herself, but which he invariably discovered later on the bills it was assumed to be a high privilege for him to pay. It had been once; it grew monotonous.

He stared at the letter, with a strange expression growing slowly in his blue eyes. Why did he dread opening it? What *could* it be about? Whitney—? Could anything be——

He tore it open. It was short: "I think you ought to know that Whitney is very ill. The doctors do not conceal from me that the result is in doubt. He has asked for you. Katharine Mackemer."

He stepped blindly to the outer office. "Slingerland, find out what time the next train leaves for Glenedge. Quick, man, quick!"

He stumbled back to his chair, and dropped into it, staring helplessly at the wall in front of him, his clever, impulsive hands lying limp on his knees as if they were detached from him.

"At 4.05, sir. In ten minutes," said Slingerland.

"Get a hack. Get me to the Northwestern. Quick!"

He caught the train, and for nearly fifty minutes filled his old place in it. The men with whom he had once ridden back and forth, morning and evening, trooped in again, in the same old way, but they slid awkwardly past his seat. What was he doing there? They were, in general, a simple, home-loving lot, and they thought of his wife and little boy. Smart man, Mackemer, but he had made a botch of that business. A stranger dropped into the seat with him, and began to talk animatedly about the foreign policy of the government. "Ah, I see you're a rabid anti-expansionist," said he, presently.

"Me?" He stared at the man. An anti-expansionist—he, who was ready to stomp the earth with the American flag. What had he been saying? He could not at all remember.

It must be very cold. People hurried in with pinched faces, and banged the car-door viciously behind them. Cold? Why, of course it was cold. Eight below on the front porch this morning, and that thermometer of West's always registered a trifle high.

What front porch? West's thermometer? His brain seemed to gasp and shiver as he realised that for a few intensely real moments something had dropped entire, like a cast-off dream, from his life. He had thought himself again the Mackemer of three short—long—eternally vanished years ago.

Rose Hill—the name set all his nerves quivering, but the train hurried away from the home of the dead; yet his mind clung to it as if it belonged there. What was the matter—what was this terrible load that oppressed him, that he could not shake off? His heart contracted suddenly. Whit, little Whit was ill! The doctors said—he closed his eyes, and forgot everything save the rolling of the wheels beneath him, with their endless grind, grind, grind. It was his heart they were grinding, fine and finer. "The mills of the gods—" he repeated, heavily, and in that instant the eyes of Isabel seemed to look into his, soft, seeking, seductive. And for the first time he flung the thought of her

furiously from him. What right had she, here—now?

"Glenedge!" He jumped up, and was out on the platform before anyone else, his feet carrying him rapidly along without conscious volition. And as he turned the familiar corner, with a rush of agony, he remembered the afternoon that he had come home for the last time. There the gay flying little figure had met him on the bicycle; he saw it again through dim eyes, tearing up the long road, lurching defiantly from side to side, courting disaster and shouting with delight at each new experience of it. And now! The street was deserted to-day, yet in a moment he almost ran into a man who hurried along, his figure set rigidly against the force of the wind. "Hullo, Van Wag," he called out, glad of a familiar face. He had always liked Van Wagner. What a saint in patience and tenderness the rough man had been to that invalid woman all these years! "How's your wife?"

The man's heavy lip quivered. "She's dead, Mr. Mackemer." His voice was dead, too.

"Dead?" Mackemer repeated. "Dead. Why, I'm so sorry." His own fear made him in a moment kin to Van Wagner's sorrow. "Oh, Van Wag, my little boy's ill."

"I know," said the man. "I went up at noon

to enquire for him, and I saw your wife. She was so good to—to—" he walked away, and Mackemer hurried on. "Awful curse, an invalid wife," he muttered, petulantly. "He'd have made lots of money in that corner store if it hadn't been for her—always wasting his time over her." He tried to drive the thought of Van Wagner away; it harassed him curiously. But there drifted persistently back within the range of his memory the stories he had heard of them years before—the fresh flower for her every morning, the lover-like courtesies from the one to the other—wonderful! in lives which had seemed destined from their lot to commonness, to gross enjoyment, or to none at all. The rough man had been gradually transformed into a gentleman of the finest type, whose unselfish ministry to his wife was only equalled in heroism by the courage with which she struggled to deny her suffering that she might see him smile. Strangest fact—that for Van Wagner life with her had been not only redemptive and ennobling, but supremely, exultantly satisfying. Marry again? Oh, no! Van Wag would never do that. The man had begun the long watch without the door of eternity, which he believed, no doubt, would one day swing wide for him, and let him in to seek her. There was already in his face the look

of the dog which, barred outside, listens to his master's step within, and unwearied waits.

Good God! To long like that for death, Death! Mackemer thrust the word from him, but it assailed him and drove him on with throbbing heart toward his child. Ah, Whit, Whit!

Yet as he passed, his eyes made critical survey of the changes in the place since he had seen it last. Rosebrugh had built on that lot, then, after all. But the house was too squat, and with that ridiculous tower! What had possessed the fellow? Probably he had acted the architect himself. No. It must have taken a man skilled in the torture of wood and stone to accomplish a monstrosity like that.

Ah, the charm of this winter landscape! The veriest boor must feel his slow pulse stir to the abundant beauty of nature on a summer's day, the fragrant fields basking beneath the blue, the green of leaf, the gold of sunshine, the passionate appeal of prodigal colour—but the call for recognition was to more strenuous stuff when the dead leaves rattled in the north wind. That thought captured Mackemer as his eye swept the snow-fronted hill beyond, with its thin black line of trees lifting their winter-bound branches to the cold remoteness of the sky. A bare tree had a marvellous fascination for him. The mingling

of grace and austerity, of severe outline with the intricate lacing of twig and bough in forms as delicate as the frost pictures on the pane, always awoke in him the memory of his mother. Why? He never could discover. He could just remember her—delicate, graceful, with the devoutness of a nun allied to the arts of a coquette. His father—ah, he had been told that he was a strange, stern man, curiously deficient in a sense of humour when it came to the question of appreciating his pretty little wife's clever affectations of piety. For there were, unfortunately, other diversions in which she indulged with a devotion quite equal to that which she accorded to her little comedy of religion. His thoughts of his father had always been antagonistic, but he had lately felt strange stirrings in himself of the man who had left to the world a son who had seemed so secure a reproduction of his mother.

A lonely group of pines moaned as Mackemer passed—"Nature's violins"—he thought, and shivered, for the music of a violin was a joy to him at times too near to agony to bear. And then, in the next moment, at the turn of the road, his house stood out before him plainly, but the sudden sight of it blinded him; he looked away, while his feet drew him steadily nearer. The dear familiarity of it struck in upon his heart—

he could have sobbed like a hurt child to find himself so close to it once more. But before he had time to realise that he had reached the gate, his hand stretched instinctively to the latch, and then for the moment he stood still. Ah, after all, then, Katharine had not altered the direction of the path as she had always wished to do. Why not? It all looked as if he had but left it this morning; even the dry leaves were huddled in the same little dips and hollows of the lawn from which he had so often raked them.

At the door his finger sought his latch-key pocket; then the blood in his body turned suddenly hot as he remembered, and rang the bell like any alien.

The door opened; everything turned dark to him. Someone stood there, and he heard a voice murmur. Was it his own? He followed the figure to the library on feet that seemed to have the weight of pyramids attached to them, and when he became aware that he was alone, he sat down, so glad that he need no longer bear himself up. But presently he straightened. What nonsense was this he had been going through? He was tired—he had had a hard day—that suit of Drysdale's, and then—then—ah, Whit, Whit! In an instant his hardily assumed control deserted him; he could have moaned aloud.

Why were they so long? Why was he not taken to his child at once? He rose in angered impatience as the sound of a step in the hall reached him, and Dr. Regester entered the room. He greeted Mackemer politely, but his eyes were cold, and deliberately absent from the interview in which his feelings were so actively engaged. "You will, of course, be anxious to know at once how Whitney is," he began, in an expressionless voice. "All that I can say is, that there is no perceptible change for the worse since last night."

"Then he is not any better?" said Mackemer, breathlessly.

Regester shook his head. "You see, it's like this—" he went into explanatory detail as to the disease and its course.

Mackemer sat still, looking into the upturned crown of his hat, apparently unmoved, and, free for a moment to examine him, Regester studied him with critical eyes. The man had changed greatly. The face was sharper—the lines about the mouth colder. Had he hardened or had he acquired a reserve which had once been foreign to his nature?

"Then you have done everything?" said Mackemer, at last. He did not raise his eyes.

"Everything. Dr. Starr was here this morning."

"And now, can I see him?"

Regester hesitated, and Mackemer looked up sharply; as the eyes of the two men met there was a flash of antagonism between them.

"You understand that my wife sent for me," began Mackemer, and then gripped his lips. His wife! Oh, that of all things he should have been betrayed into saying that!

"Yes, we thought you ought to know," said Regester, in a voice that bit, and Mackemer flushed hotly. His child—and they barred him behind that "we." But his dignity held; he looked directly at Regester as he said, quietly: "His mother wrote that he asked for me. Will you tell her that I am here, and ask if I may see him now?" But the request was altogether a command, and Regester hesitated, stubbornly. He was thinking only of Katharine and of the fearful conflict he had watched in her before she had written that note to her husband.

"Perhaps you do not realise what a great strain it will necessarily be to the child to see you again," he said, sharply.

Mackemer looked at him. His eyes were dim with tears. "Perhaps you forget that I am Whitney's father, and that he knows it," he answered, simply. And, in spite of interdict, Regester's heart went out to him in quick sympathy. He

left the room without further word, and it was some minutes before he returned. "Whitney is having a very bad turn," he explained, in a disturbed voice. "I think you might just as well see him. And his mother has told him that you are here."

But Mackemer drew back. "Then that is it," he said, despairingly. "I had better go away. I have done him harm already."

"No, no! He must see you now. Nothing can be worse than this. And perhaps you can help. His mother said that." He hurried Mackemer up the stairs.

But when the bedroom door had closed after them everything turned black to him again. He felt Regester place a chair for him; he caught unsteadily at the back of it, and stood there until against the whiteness of the piled-up pillows there gradually defined itself to him a thin little face flushed high with fever. It seemed to him that he had stood there for age-enduring moments before he at last saw it, with its bright, appalling restless eyes.

"Papa, Papa!"

He pushed the chair aside, and knelt down beside the bed.

"Oh, Whit, Whit, Papa's here! Papa's here!"

The child moved a faint little finger toward

him, and the father took the frail hand in his strong, cool grasp.

"I'm so sick, Papa—so sick!" The words came dry and dull from the parched lips.

"I know, Whit." He stroked the boy's hair tenderly with deft fingers. An intense calmness fell upon him. "Don't worry to talk, old chap. You want a drink? Here—that's it. Now, then," oh, so softly, softly, "let me smooth that pillow."

And the child yielded blissfully to the magic of his voice and touch. There was a long silence after that; only his boy and himself a reality to Mackemer; the rest of life a blur in the distance. But the bright open eyes fixed on his face tortured him—how was he to coax them to close in healing sleep? "Whit, I'm so tired," he said, in the lightest voice. "I've had such a hard day in the office. I'm going to take a nap right here beside you, holding your hand. Don't you remember the naps you and I used to have side by side on the big rug in the library?" He leaned back in his chair, and closed his eyes; the room grew still again, save for his steadied breath, and Whitney's, short, and thick, and fevered. Regester beckoned to the nurse, and she went out with him. And then, for nearly an hour, Mackemer watched alone beside his boy, sunk deep in a

treacherous sleep. His arm cramped torturingly from the ends of his fingers slowly up to his shoulder, but the grip of the little hand upon his was a privilege for which pain was cheap payment.

His heart quailed as he noted the swift ravages of the disease—the gaunt face, with its sunken eyes, the long, sharp outline of the little figure beneath the light covering. It seemed incredible that a few days of fever and pain could inflict so great a change. But—he set his teeth resolutely. He was there—he would fight it through with them. Never before had he realised how utterly and inseparably his every thought of the future was bound up with the life of his boy. Now, with the shadow of Death's wings above the little bed, he dared cry to the Great Destroyer, "Halt!"

"Mamma, Mamma!" The hoarse call from the child startled him; he shrank back in dismay as the door opened and Katharine came in—Katharine, the mother of his boy.

"Oh, Mamma, where's Papa? He's gone—he's gone!" Whitney stared with unseeing eyes straight into his father's face.

"No, no, darling. Papa's here. See, close beside you." It was her voice, low and ineffably tender, and Mackemer thrilled in a thousand

nerves at the sound of it. He could not look at her—it seemed to him that every breath she drew came spiked from his own heart. He could only sit there in helpless silence, while she soothed her child with tenderest endearment until the wild light died out of his eyes and he recognised his father again. "Oh, Papa, Papa," he sobbed, "I thought you were gone!"

"No, no, Whit, I won't go away. I'm going to stay with you, boy." His voice frightened him. There was a strange quality in it, new, unknown before, which seemed to match something deep within himself; equally new, equally strange, but suddenly, passionately, insistently alive in him. The nurse came in to change a compress, and Whitney fought her away, with feeble cries distressing to hear. "Let me," said Mackemer, quietly, and the change was made while he told a story with inimitable ease and charm. The woman was outraged at the introduction of such methods into a sick-room where death battled with life, but even she yielded presently to the spell of the tale, and listened with a blessed relaxation of anxiety, until Mackemer's voice grew soft and softer and the story faded from the canvas upon which he had so lightly sketched it, and Whitney fell into the first refreshing sleep that he had known for days. Ah, his father was a master

hand at manipulating his audience; the gift of temperament which made him a great pleader at the bar stood him in good stead just now.

Moment by moment the sands of time slid through the great glass of life, and he and Katharine sat motionless, watching their sleeping boy. Her face was like carved stone—she was pitifully still—but she was demanding more of herself than any woman could fulfil, and presently the cruellest tears began to slip slowly from her rigid eyes. She ignored them proudly, but they came fast, and faster, and in an agony of apprehension she turned her face unwittingly toward Mackemer; their eyes met in a shock terrible to them both. It seemed as if their souls locked in a moment of awful struggle; then she rose in desperation to leave her place by the bed. But she turned back.

"Oh, Clifford," she said, in a low, broken voice, "don't you see? My little boy is dying. He is going to be taken from me—he is all that I have!"

Mackemer leaned across the narrow bed, and gripped her white, nerveless hand in his. In that moment he stood in the path of a hurricane sweeping down upon him he knew not whence, and carrying him he cared not whither. "Katharine!" he whispered, "Katharine, listen to me.

He will not die. Something tells me so. We will save him, you and I."

His strong grasp, his confident eyes, infused new faith into her. She looked at him with the pathetic confidence of a clinging child. But Regester came into the room, and their hands parted sharply; Katharine sank back into her chair, with a weary sigh.

"Mrs. Mackemer needs rest," said Mackemer, simply, to him. "I think she could sleep now that she knows I am here. It will be better for Whitney, when he wakes, to find his mother rested, too."

Regester took her away, and Mackemer, left alone, studied the nurse's chart until he had the history and routine of the case easily in hand. The latent instinct of the physician asserted itself strongly in him, and before he knew how it happened he had assumed quite naturally the charge and responsibility which the nurse had considered exclusively her own, but so tactfully that she was led to imagine her prestige enhanced. About ten o'clock Regester came in and looked over the chart, upon which he noted Mackemer's writing. The man's ease amazed him. During his absence he had secured the seat of authority, here—in this house, under such outrageous circumstances. The way the boy clung

to him was a study in itself—he recalled the incident of the watch, and marvelled at the strains the relation of parent and child could sustain.

“Miss Stein says you intend to sit up all night. Then you had better come down for some supper now,” he said, coldly. “I shall remain here, in case you need me, but I must get my sleep. I was up all last night with a case.”

When he reached the dining-room, away once more from the immediate influence of Whitney, Mackemer had a moment in which his heart seemed to freeze. He remembered Isabel. Isabel? His mind suffered sudden, intolerable confusion. He had forgotten her existence.

He looked wistfully about the familiar room. Nothing in it had changed. The paper on the walls was the same that he and Katharine had chosen with such care—in spite of fashion’s caprice, the artistic quality of it charmed him still. Between the wide windows it startled him to see yet hanging the picture of himself, painted by an artist since famous, that he had given her on the first anniversary of their wedding, and as he looked long at the young, confident face there came to him some bitter thoughts. Life struck him as a crueler riddle than he had ever thought it before—sitting there in his old place at his own table, to which he had now no right.

His face settled into hard lines, of which the young face on the canvas held no prophecy, and Regester, watching him, wondered again. Had his life hurt him, or had it hardened more than hurt? He could not tell.

"I must go out at once. I want to telephone," said Mackemer, abruptly.

"But why? You can telephone from here."

"No, no." The tone was decisive. And Regester thought he understood. The man at least would not desecrate the sacredness of this home by a message to that—other wife.

"But what am I to say?" thought Mackemer, confusedly. He took out his note-book at last and wrote down what he had laboured at so dully. It looked simple and sincere enough. It was to Slingerland. "Telephone at once to the Engalatcheff and tell them I have gone out of town on business. I shall be back in a day or two." He remembered that Isabel was to be out late to-night at somebody's concert, and that he had told her he should remain at the office to work up the Drysdale case with Slingerland.

As he shut the door and stepped into the darkness of the night he stood still a moment. The moon hung like a golden globe in the sky; a light as of day silvered the snow on the hill-top, and cast tender, shrouding shadow upon the gaunt

skeleton trees below; the wind mourned in lonely monody—only the whisper of the leaves answered to its wail. And Mackemer stood there, as he had so often stood before, and looked up at the dark sea sailed by the silent stars above him—those stars bound for what port?—all heedless of the human story beneath them, its anguish, its triumphs, its joys, and its tragedies. What was he—of less or more value than the least or the greatest of them?

After he had got rid of his message, he walked back slowly, letting the beauty, the mystery of the night take ever firmer hold of his facile imagination. Along the lonely road he seemed to tread a golden, enchanted pathway, until the sombre outline of the dark hill toward which his little child might soon be borne loomed black before him, and pale fear took grip of his heart again. Life to-day—death to-morrow—one as arbitrary as the other.

No! He hurried into the house, bitter, resolute, eager for the fight. Outside Whitney's door he met Katharine, pacing restlessly to and fro.

"Oh, where have you been so long? He has cried for you. And he must not cry. How could you go away like that?"

She cared for nothing, knew nothing any more, save that he was necessary to her child.

"Katharine, I had to go away," he said, quietly. "But I will not leave this house again until he is better."

And when he went in he soothed the boy with an abandonment of tenderness such as he had not hitherto allowed himself; it seemed to him that his heart must flow molten from his lips, so precious to him was the knowledge that the child needed him, that he was not barred out of his life.

Airlie was away with her mother and Aunt Betha at Windwater. Katharine was glad of that. In this great crisis she and the child needed nothing but the father, and they had him. For the moment the circle was complete.

And so the long night, never to be forgotten, began. The nurse was sent to her six-hours' sleep, Regester went to the library—Katharine and Mackemer were alone. She brought him an old house-coat that she had never had the heart to give away, because it recalled so many happy evenings of the long ago, and he put it on, with a sharp stab of remembrance. For a long time they were busy with Whitney; again and again he broke into delirious cries, but at last he dozed heavily, and Katharine felt an appalling weariness steal over her. With the coming of her husband a great and lonely responsibility had been

lifted from her—she had not thought of that when she had sent for him, but now she leaned as of old upon his judgment, his courage, and the relief to her overtaxed heart was almost more than she could bear. It seemed to her that her child's life rested in the hollow of his hand, but what a strong, firm hand it was. To think that he was there again—so near to her—within her trembling fingers' touch, but—! She closed her eyes and fought with her pain, until sleep came and sealed the springs of sorrow in her heart.

Mackemer did not look at her. He had been in the house just a few brief hours, but they had done a great work. Had she been an enhaloed saint and he a *religieux* at her feet he could not have been steeped in a more exalted mystical sense of her sacredness. Why was it that, faded, weary, worn to a shadow with anxiety and grief, she expressed to him at this moment all that was divinest in his thought of woman?

The night dragged on, but at three o'clock Mackemer saw with alarm that Whitney's temperature was rising again. He needed help, for there must be another pack, and he hoped that his movements about the room would arouse Katharine, but she slept the profound sleep of exhaustion. "Katharine, Katharine!" he said at last, softly.

She sat up instantly, but she was dreaming still. "Oh, Clifford, Clifford!" she cried, joyously; but the sound of her own voice awakened her to a bitter realisation of the truth as it was between them, and she turned her face from his. Only for an instant, then her high spirit came to her rescue.

"What is it?" she asked, breathlessly. "Oh, I have been asleep. How could I? You want help?"

He pointed silently to the record on the chart, and she understood, and in a moment was as coolly alert as he. Between them they managed the child with a skill which could have been expected of no nurse—he was their own, and they knew his every little crotchet.

Then they sat still, and waited, that terrible waiting in the smothering night, when each tick of the clock seemed like a last heart-beat, until Katharine, unable to bear the strain any longer, slipped away to her room, to pace up and down with the step of a caged thing. A long time passed; she could not go back, and then she heard Mackemer at her half-open door. "Katharine," he called, gently, "Katharine, Whitney wants you."

For an instant she stood silent in the darkness; then she broke into an uncontrollable passion of

tears. "I can't," she whispered, loudly—"I can't."

He pushed the door open, and in the dim light from the hall made his way toward her. "Do you think it right, do you think it fair to Whitney, for you to forget yourself like this?" he asked, coldly.

She drew herself up. "It is easy for you to say that. What is all this to you? What do you care for us—what do you care for Whitney, whether he is here to-day, or to-morrow, what is it to you? But to me——"

Her eyes met his in passionate recrimination; then she stepped past him and walked with head high toward Whitney's room.

"Katharine, Katharine!" It was a cry from Mackemer. How could she know that in the moment when he had spoken so coldly to her, it had strained every bolt and bar of his self-control to save him from betraying the passionate sympathy he felt for her.

There was a strange note in his voice, one that she had never heard before, and it held her. She half turned and looked back at him, with bewildered eyes, and then there dawned in her face a mystery of tenderness, of pathetic appeal, of sweetest remembrance.

And as he saw her now so she remained for-

ever after in his most enduring memory of her, when that memory had become alike the most precious and the most cruel treasure of his heart. There came to him rare mystical moments, in the heat of legal debate, in the hushed loneliness of the night, in the sudden flush of the sky into sunset flame, when he saw her beloved and lost face again, there, close to him, humanly near, with the breath of life unquenched upon her lips, and the light of enduring love in her steadfast eyes.

CHAPTER XII

TWO days later Mackemer took the train from Glenedge to Milwaukee, and upon his arrival there telegraphed to Isabel and to Slingerland that he had been detained, but would reach home that afternoon.

He was going back to Isabel. Back to Isabel? Why, he *must* go back to her; he had no power or privilege to do anything else. It was where he belonged. *Was* it?

He roused himself sharply, and walked up and down the platform. Many a woman followed him with admiring eyes, envious of the some other woman to whom he belonged. But to whom did he belong? What had happened to him in these two days—had he lost the power to understand himself, to justify himself?

He had no courage to recall his parting with Whitney. "Whit, I have to go away. But I will come back," he had said.

"But why do you have to go away?" protested Whitney, with weak, irritable tears. "Is it because of the other lady?"

Mackemer stared steadily before him, with set, unhearing face. But the child persisted. "Is it, Papa? Then you love the other lady best—better than mother—you don't love her?"

There was no answer.

"Has the other lady a little boy, too?" Whitney turned passionate eyes upon his father.

"No," said Mackemer, heavily. "Whit, I'm in trouble, boy. I can't tell you about it. Some day you'll know, and then you won't—" he leaned over the bed, taking the little, wasted hand in his own—"but, Whit, if there ever comes a time when my boy turns away from me—" he laid his head down beside the child's, and there was a long silence in the room, while Whitney and he quivered with a strange sense of their nearness and dearness to each other.

When Mackemer at last reached the Engletcheff, and his own flat, he was told that Isabel was lying down. Putting a crowd of thoughts forcibly from him, he walked quickly to her room. She did not see his face until he kissed her lightly on the forehead.

"Oh, naughty boy!" she exclaimed, "to leave his little wife so long." She patted his head, playfully; he stood and stared at the pot of Easter lilies blooming beside her. They made him think of Katharine, tall, and white, and

pure, in God's sight. Then, afraid, he kissed Isabel again, and she smiled upon him, satisfied.

"There, run away and get clean and pretty, like a nice boy, for you look all tired and travelled, as if you had worked your way back from the Klondike. And then come and admire me."

Ah, to be sure, the pink and white of her looked charming in a marvellous pale-blue house-gown.

He went into his dressing-room, and looked out of the window, out over the great city, ravaged by the disease and despair of humanity. "I can't do it," he muttered. "I can't do it. It's too hard."

Away there in the dim twilight north, was the happy home spot. He wondered what they were doing now. Twenty-four hours ago he had been sitting there, one of them, coaxing Whit to eat a bit of supper, and Katharine had watched them, her face peacefully free from anxiety, absorbed in the moment, unthinking of the lonely morrow.

He set his teeth and turned from the window.

But Isabel was not a dull woman, and in the days which followed she arrived at some disturbing conclusions.

"Clifford, what happened to you in Milwaukee?" she asked him, suddenly, as they sat alone

in the library one evening. She had been covertly watching him for a long time.

"What happened to me in Milwaukee?" he repeated, slowly. "Why, what always happens to any unusually handsome man."

"Ah, that isn't it," she said, quickly. "What did?"

"I have never talked business to you, have I, Isabel? Do you wish me to begin now?"

"No. I never discuss domestic affairs with you."

"That's so," he answered, with a smile, in which she recognised a meaning. But she had no interest in taking that up just now; she had no intention of being diverted from the point in question.

"Did you see Whitney or Mrs. Mackemer?" Isabel was a brave woman.

He looked at her a moment with steady blue eyes. Steady—yes, for it seemed as if his heart had stopped beating. Then he answered: "No." He had not seen them in Milwaukee. "Perhaps you haven't noticed in the papers," he continued, almost without pause, "what is said about this suit of Drysdale's?"

"Yes, I have, and I thought you ought to make a big thing out of it."

As a profession, the law appealed to Isabel

solely as a shrewd science for the acquiring of the other fellow's money.

"Ah, that remains to be seen. If I do, I shall have earned it—this time," he added, with a short laugh.

Had he told her the truth? She was not sure, but on the whole she preferred to believe that he had; she went over and sat on the arm of his chair, and patted his cheeks, and pulled his hair, and was altogether charming.

"I sha'n't let you go to Milwaukee again for all the Drysdales in creation," she said. "You don't know what you looked like when you came back, and you've never acted the same since. I don't believe you've said one pretty thing to me since you reached home."

"Oh, I have," he protested, desperately.

"And you have always been quite ideal about that until now," she went on. "I remember your saying once that the very perfume of my hair hypnotised you."

"It did," he answered, simply.

Unexpectedly her lip quivered. "Dearest," she whispered, "be good to me. I'm so afraid."

Her head fell against his shoulder, and he soothed her with the old passionate endearments.

But in the middle of the night when he awoke

and listened to her even breath, his brow grew heavy with the dews of hell.

Some weeks later, in the early spring-time, his little daughter was born. During the long hours when Isabel's feet strayed far within the shadowed valley, there came to him some terrible thoughts. But he had brought this horror upon himself. Then let him bear it like a man—at the least not a whimpering coward. Yet when he first heard the feeble wail which told him another child was his, his feeling of repulsion would hardly brook control. But when, in forced deference to the demands of the case, he went in and looked upon the face of the little babe, his heart went out to it in a mighty overflow of tenderness and pity. He took it reverently in his arms, and studied its tiny face with dimming eyes. The old problem of evil encompassed him. Why should sin result in anything so fair as this? And why should anything as fair as this be stained with sin? He gave the baby abruptly back to the nurse, and went away without a word.

Isabel recovered rapidly, but she made the most of this new experience, and would have enjoyed her convalescence thoroughly if only the child could have been left out of it. She had not desired it—it had been a necessity—to offset Whitney. If it had been a boy—perhaps! But

she hated little girls, and it filled her veins with poison to watch Mackemer with it. He hung over it, fascinated by the mystery of its being, thrilled to the heart of his manhood each time it fastened its fairy finger upon his. He looked at the tiny nail. "Isabel," he whispered, "it must take wonderfully fine tools to turn out such a piece of work as that."

She yawned behind the lace on her handkerchief—lace worth far more than a baby's fingernail.

"Dear, you're a poet, and charming," she said, sweetly.

She understood herself well. Nature had designed her to be the mistress of men—not the mother of girls, and late that night when the nurse brought the baby to her, she turned aside.

"Take it away," she said, in a voice that shook.

"But it's hungry," protested the woman, anxiously.

"Then feed it," she answered, indifferently. "I know I sha'n't. Never again." She looked at the nurse with eyes which made the woman quail. There was lightning under those long, narrow lids.

At the end of the month she was driving in the park, looking handsomer than ever. The

church ladies had been profuse in flowers and attentions of every type, and Isabel had never been more pleased with herself. For the sake of her reputation as an ideal wife she had become the mother of a baby, like any washerwoman. Could Quixoticism further go?

"Oh, Mrs. Mackemer, I do hope your voice will not be injured," gushed a deacon's wife. "You have risked a great deal for that baby."

"And suppose it is," smiled Isabel. "Is my baby not worth the sacrifice?"

But when her visitors were gone she hurried to the piano, her face a study in discords. Her hands trembled; she feared the first note incredibly. Ah, but that was sweet and strong—why, her voice had improved. Was it the rest? She sat down again, at peace with herself and all the world—except that baby. She was so tired of pretending to love it before Mackemer. And she must persevere in that, for the very reason of its existence was the increased hold it gave her upon its father. Away, deep in her heart there lay always the consciousness of a great fear; for even this Isabel was not without her visions of something pure and holy within herself, and these visions, rare and fleeting, were a terror to her. For then she knew that, deny it as she might with all the force of her vehement will,

she was not Mackemer's wife. It was to defy this tormenting consciousness that she had called a little child to earth.

Her passion for Mackemer was at times a misery to her. Why did she love him so that she could never again care for other men, as it was, after all, her nature to do?

Ah! she had made him hers, and hers he should always remain.

But could she not afford now to forget some of the problems that had vexed her before she was ill? For Mackemer was almost reverentially tender to her, and though she had the baby, she had kept both her voice and her figure. So she rioted in a marvellous display of new spring gowns, and the costume in which she worshipped God on Easter Sunday filled her soul with such peace as she knew religion was powerless to bestow.

According to his promise Mackemer had gone out to Glenedge again to see Whitney, but he had caught no glimpse of Katharine. It had been a trying, almost impossible visit, yet he had made the child happy, and he had promised to go again, when they should return from the long change of air and scene upon which Regester insisted.

He was glad they were away. It simplified

things—for the time. The nurse learned to look for his step in the late afternoon, for he devoted himself to the baby when he was at home. He had many new thoughts as he sat there silently watching this tiny bit of womanhood. It occurred to him that some of the deepest truths about women must remain sealed to the man who has never had a daughter of his own. The world had been a cruel place to woman, and her glibly talked-of purity a treasure but little understood and valued by the men who demanded it—for sacrifice.

He could not think of this child as Isabel's; in his heart he dedicated it to Katharine, with a passionate longing to guard it from grief and guilt under the sacred protection of her name. So many things had begun to come clear to him; the time was past when he could have been deceived by Isabel's pretty expressions of affection for her baby, and her eagerness that he should profess a vast devotion to it.

Yes, the child had been a great success, almost too great; still as Isabel shrewdly balanced one emotion against another she felt that the venture had paid richly. She was several years older than Mackemer, a fact of which she had never permitted him to become aware, and as she thought of the years stretching far ahead,

she was acutely perceptive of herself on the wane, while her husband was still in his prime. But now there would be the budding girl to interest him and awaken his pride. She had desired a boy, but how wise fate had been, for the girl was always more to the father than the boy.

Her voice would not last at its best much longer, and she had grown feverishly anxious to bulwark her social position. As long as she was an acceptable singer she was certain of satisfying prominence, but when she ceased to be that there was nothing open to her except social distinction, and that was difficult to acquire. But she meant to have it.

When the baby was six weeks old she sang one Sunday morning a tender, dreamy little solo composed for her by the organist of the church. Her costume was a study in silver gray, an appallingly costly imitation of simplicity, and beneath her toque of white violets her red hair made a magnificent frame for the wild-rose delicacy of her face. She had never looked so effective in her life, and she knew it. The next afternoon a great lady called to see her. "Oh, Mrs. Mackemer, we all enjoyed you so much yesterday," she said, in the tone a bootblack might have thought kind. "Going

to church is such an exertion to me, but I assure you I felt quite repaid. And now, as I intend to give a large reception on the thirtieth, I came in to see if you would sing on that date for me."

Isabel hesitated; her lips curved to a charming smile, her eyes gleamed narrowly. She could have stifled the woman in front of her in her own silks and laces, but this was her opportunity.

"Why, Mrs. Peake-Hill, I shall be delighted to sing for you," she exclaimed, with the enthusiasm of a child. "I love to do anything I can for my friends. But do you know, sometimes, just because they think I sing in church, people imagine they can have me sing for them by paying for me. It's not always at all a nice thing to be the owner of a little gift." She laughed, cosily. "You remember that at Mrs. Lamson's, last month, she had that Mrs. Currie sing." Mrs. Lamson and Mrs. Peake-Hill were social rivals, but, as Isabel shrewdly suspected, Mrs. Peake-Hill had quite intended engaging Mrs. Currie also. "Such a mistake! This hiring of professionals has grown so common that the only elegant thing to do now is to have one or two of one's own friends play or sing in a simple old-fashioned way; that is, if one has friends

who can." She laughed again charmingly. "Don't you think so?"

"Oh, of course, of course," murmured Mrs. Peake-Hill, nervously. The sudden acquisition of riches had forced her into the position of a great lady, especially as her husband had political ambitions, but she lacked the initiative of a leader, and was painfully aware of it. This woman impressed her as having the desired quality in abundance, she did not know just why. She was a lonely woman; Isabel struck her as delightfully friendly.

"But of course you must have some one besides me," continued Isabel, confidentially. "There's Mr. Cutts—he's such a friend of your husband's—don't you suppose he would play for you? And Miss Osborne—that little thing plays the violin divinely—and she's your own niece—why, that's all you want, Mrs. Peake-Hill."

It was all Isabel wanted. Really, if one had but the trick, the world was the easiest place to get on in. She felt almost dizzy with success. She had done in ten minutes what it would have taken most women years to accomplish. Ah, she would yet stifle with satisfied social ambition the canker gnawing ever at her heart—the knowledge that she was not respectable.

"And now my gown for it," she thought, exultantly. "I'll stagger them." Between that and the reception she saw Mrs. Peake-Hill frequently, and materially assisted that lady by the cleverness of her suggestions. She also practised indefatigably with Howard Cutts, who had consented to accompany her songs—a young man who, as she explained to her husband, had plenty of prestige, but no furniture—brain furniture. That did not in the least matter to her; she had a sufficiency of that herself, but she was short of prestige, and anxious to secure it on almost any terms.

When she at last swept out to Mackemer on the night of the reception she was clever enough not to ask him how she looked. There was some change at work in him—it was that baby—he had said the queerest things of late, and she had divined the shadow over what he had once admired most in her. To-night he followed her in silence to the carriage—well, she must not worry about that until later.

When she stood up to sing between the clusters of artfully shaded lights Mackemer quivered.

"Who is she?" asked an Englishman behind him. "Very handsome bellows, by Jove."

She was a success that night. So much flat-

tery would have lost her balance to a woman of less secure poise, but she was wise, and she sought her place at her husband's side after each of her numbers. When Howard Cutts importuned her for a stroll in the moonlit garden she declined the experience with all the shyness of a *débutante*. And for the first time in her life the blaze of a man's eyes chilled her. What was the matter with her? She wondered at herself with a nervousness new to her. And when, just as she began her last song, she looked back and saw Mackemer standing alone in the shadow, she made him in the flash of the moment a fresh offering of her strange heart.

"Oh, darling!" she said, as the carriage-door closed upon them. "You aren't like any other man, and I can never love you enough."

He went through it all once more, the mockery of passionately protested devotion. What else could he do?

Thus day after day went by, while he searched the horizon for relief. At last the baby died. He sat for hours, numb with misery, watching the going out of its tiny life. He was new to grief like this, and its tenacity appalled him. What was it over which he wept?—a little child as yet too young to know him. It had sent deep

roots into his life; had it gone forever, unlinked to his, unknowing of him?

To Isabel the baby's death was, after all, a relief. "He really had got too fond of it," she argued. "And now he never will forget it, and that will do. Perhaps he will grow human again, and not quite such fit company for angels as he has been lately." She mourned it becomingly for a few weeks, and then everything went on again as before.

One afternoon Mackemer came home early with a headache. He let himself in listlessly, unconscious of his quietness, and then the thought of the cool, green library allured him, and he stepped in there, quite surprising his wife and Howard Cutts. The young man was leaning over the back of her chair, and with her head turned she was looking up into his face. The familiarity of the attitude was intolerable to Mackemer, but he made no sign, and in spite of the evident illness, which accounted naturally for his return, he courageously maintained a polite conversation until the visitor withdrew. Then, with a sigh of relief, but without a word to Isabel, he stretched himself upon the couch. She hovered over him in anxious ministrations, until he said, gently: "It's nothing, dear. If I can sleep a while I shall soon be all right again."

She kissed him lightly, and laid a cool hand for a moment on his hot, aching head, then went softly away. And he lay there, alone, not sleeping, but thinking—thinking.

Yes, he might lose her.

Well, what of it?

Why, *she was a wife of his*. She had been the mother of a child of his. He repeated that, over and over again to himself, insistently, cruelly. At this crisis he was no shirk. It was his duty to keep her true. He sickened at the thought of further sin for her, depths beyond anything into which she had fallen with him. She loved him, but it would not be in her nature to love him, indifferent, in the face of the next man's volcanic devotion. Now, for the first time, he felt himself strangely, terribly, charged with her salvation. Of all men—he!

And over against all this—the unwearying cry of his soul, day and night, night and day, for Katharine—Katharine with her unstained soul looking upward out of pure eyes. Oh, God, how he needed her! His heart was black with defilement, and only she could cleanse it. Was his own salvation of no account? In his despair he had sometimes a vision of her, far away, eternally removed from him in the unfathomable immensity of heaven, her blessed

face the only point of light for him in a Universe of darkness. And now he saw himself eternally linked with Isabel, forever fighting to reach that far-off heaven, and forever failing because of her. Because of her? Because of himself. At any cost let him be honest. He had no right to a heaven denied to Isabel.

He turned his face from the faint light with a groan, and Isabel, hearing him, came hurrying to the room.

"Oh, Katharine!" He smothered the name with a sob in his heart, and held out his hand to Isabel.

She came to him, radiant.

CHAPTER XIII

“**H**OW do you like my wife’s hat?” inquired John Cassius, looking gravely at Airlie. He had but just discovered a serious charm in the frivolities of feminine adornment.

“Oh, that hat—why, it’s—it’s like one of mine that Whitney calls ‘an enjoyable hat,’ because there’s plenty of colour to it. At heart you men beings are all the same. You affect great scorn, but you adore the stylish woman. And Mary’s a conjurer with clothes.”

“Oh, Mary’s a—” John Cassius stopped.

The two girls looked at each other and laughed tremulously. “Oh, my dear, he’s a reckless shopper,” said Mary, lightly. “His method of buying clothes is absolutely unique. There are three other hats at the hotel, hats which I happened to admire in windows, and which he straightway went in and bought. But this one was his own particular choice. It’s far too young and gay for me, Airlie.”

“No, it isn’t,” said Airlie, decisively. “Mary,

you're just the sweetest thing." They laughed again, and went on with a conversation which ignored the presence of John Cassius, but he sat listening in a dream of delight. That little bit of a woman in the rose-covered hat was his, and since she had become his, the sky and the trees, the faces of men and women—the whole world had changed colour for him. He quivered as his eyes caressed her, for the mystery of love had taken him captive, and no ransom in the wide world would ever be rich enough to redeem him. Lovely poetic fancies flitted throughout his mind; he had no power to seize and desecrate their beauty in speech, he could only yield to the spell he had no wish to analyse, and feel himself for the first time in his lonely, starved life exultantly alive.

The old gray house was to be made charming, a fit abode for such a Mary, and Henry was to have the way to scholarship smoothed for him by his sister's pocket-book, an article of her own which no Dargey woman had ever before possessed. He recalled his mother's lean parsimony with horror, yet perhaps she, too, in her early bridal days, had had something of the same sweet, warm, generous impulse which Mary seemed to feel for every waif and stray of the streets.

When they said good-by, he clasped Air-lie's hand strongly, and looked straight into her eyes. "Thank you," he said, and she understood.

"But when are you going to get married yourself, dear?" asked Mary, as they hung over the gate for the last farewells.

Airlie shook her head. "My child, to be happy I should require a husband for every mood, consequently—" She shrugged her shoulders.

They laughed and parted, and she stood there watching them out of sight, her mind the arena of mixed emotions.

"John Cassius Dargey, why, I wouldn't have married him—!" Her eyes twinkled. "But it is funny to see the man who vowed to adore you eternally married to another girl. And that 'thank you!' It wasn't only gratitude for Mary, it was a tribute as well to my cleverness in perceiving how much more devotedly he could love her than he ever could have loved me. Well, perhaps—" she hopped slowly back to the house on one foot, and practised scales vehemently for fifteen minutes, until, with a curious sense of interferent personality close to her, she turned her head, to find Regester sitting in a chair as calmly as if he owned it.

"Hm! Must like scales," she remarked, briefly.

"I do," he answered, with effusion.

She swept up and down the key-board again, but it was not in her nature to sing in solitude for two, one of the two being that particular young man, and presently she whirled off the stool, and sat down before him on a little ottoman. "A horrid, horrid thing happened to me to-day," she began at once. "I was singing Vercellio's 'Bethlehem' superbly, yes, superbly, at the studio, when a lady was shown in who, I should think, might once have been Dido of Carthage or the Queen of Sheba, or any of those people. She sat down on *one* chair, and it actually didn't break. Such magnificence! Do you know who it was?"

"Go on," said Regester.

"You couldn't stop me. I sang on, of course, until I had finished, but you may believe I studied the lovely colour scheme out of the tail of my eye. Yet it wasn't her clothes. It was her manner. It was full of colour, colour, colour. Yes, you smile. I don't care."

"But you couldn't have said anything more entirely descriptive," he protested, "only for the word colour I should perhaps substitute another which would mean nothing to you."

"Oh, you would! I wonder what. What a curious thing to say! Why would it mean nothing to me? And yet you say my description was perfect. And in the next breath, that you could better it. Oh, the innate conceit of man!"

Regester laughed. "Never mind! Tell me some more. It's interesting."

"Yes, but you see *I* hadn't the least idea who it was. Well, as soon as I had finished, Vecellio pirouetted down the room to her, while I dutifully played accompaniments and stretched the drum of my ear to the bursting point, trying to hear what they said. Presently he pirouetted back, looking as near like a diplomatic tadpole as you can imagine. 'Mees Airlic, Meesees Mackemer is on the Committee of the Charitee Concairt, and she want to know will you not on that occasion for them seeng in a tubble quartette with her, my poopeel?—Yes, yes," he trumpeted into my ear, under the serene impression that he was whispering. Then it was my turn. I stood up and looked at the lady. I didn't hurry, either. Then I said to him, but *at* her: 'Who did you say the lady was, Signor?' 'Mrs. Mackemer,' she answered at once, smiling, but her eyes weren't sweet. Oh, no! 'Mrs. Mackemer?' I repeated. 'Mrs. Durance Mackemer? No, I will not sing with Mrs. Durance Mack-

emer.' Then I sat down and began to play again, and left everything to happen any way it liked, until I became aware that little Vecellio was endeavouring to kick down the ceiling on the heads of the people below us. 'Oh, you, you, you!' he shrieked, trying to see how near he could arrive at my countenance with his fists. He wanted to bite me, too, but I didn't like the idea of that. Sometimes he bites Madame, but he says those are love-bites, and I think they are, but the ones he had in his eye for me were not. 'Why you not seeng with her, little, little dog?' I stood up. You can always scare him if you stand at him. But I've even noticed that about other men. 'I won't sing with her because she's bad, *bad*,' I said. 'I won't sing with bad people.' I think I looked pretty fierce. That was how I felt, anyway. Oh, how he laughed, horribly. At last he said: 'Little one, then you will seeng all, all alone, all the rest of your life, from this time forth and for-rever more.' But presently he patted my head and said: 'Poor little gir-rerl, poor little gir-rerl!' and he was lovely to me for the rest of the lesson. Isn't he a funny man?"

Regester smiled at her. "Very." Then he asked, abruptly: "How often does Mr. Mackemer come here?"

"Every other Friday. I have never seen him. It happens to be one of my days away."

"What do you think of it?"

She stared at him.

"Tell me," he insisted. She smiled at the snap of his peremptory jaw. But when she spoke it was with eyes that flashed.

"Why should I tell you anything? You laugh at me—you think I'm just a child—" and she looked appealingly girlish this afternoon in a little apple-blossom gown of pink scattered with stray green leaves, her short hair curling tight about her dainty head, every look, every gesture an unconscious revelation of the sweet, unsullied charm of her youth—"except when I say things you don't like about men and marriage, perhaps, and then you think I'm a great deal older than I ought to be. I'm not. I'm just not a fool, that's all, but there isn't a man alive who doesn't know that a woman ought to be that, if things are to be easy enough for the men. Well, I sha'n't make any man comfortable that way, but then, neither would I do as Kathie did. If I found out that I had married a man like Clifford Mackemer, I'd have made it my everlasting business to see that he was kept busy worshipping the ground I walked on. I wouldn't have wasted time worshipping his tracks the way she did. And if I had

suspected that he was wandering from the domestic fold, I'd have hustled out and wandered with him. I'd have stuck to him tighter than glue, and if that red-haired woman had come snooping around, do you suppose for one moment that she'd have got him away from me? No, no! Not as long as I had two hands to pull her red hair with. But look at dear, helpless Kathie. She thought that life was a poem, in which the smashing of red-haired women had no place, and she simply stood magnificently aside and let fate mangle things with a free hand. If that woman had wanted that man before I was married to him, I'd have let her have him if she could get him, but when it comes to wrecking a marriage, that's different. I'd have fought that thing, night and day, in the courts and out, and I'd have beaten that red-haired woman. But Kathie couldn't, and yet she loved that man—loved him. And now, my poor Kathie! Just see what it's come to."

Regester looked at the girl without speaking. For the moment he was not thinking of Katharine.

Airlie shook her fingers impatiently in his face. "Why don't you say something? Just think how I'm worried about my Kathie."

"I'm glad you are. I had wondered if you—if you realised."

"If I realised?" she snapped. "Well!"

"Does *she*?"

"No, I don't think she thinks about it. She's just letting herself go. And you must remember that she has never admitted that he has ceased to belong to her."

"That's it. That's the extraordinary danger. But what is the man thinking of?"

"Oh, the man!" exclaimed Airlie, contemptuously. "And yet you know, how could he see her now, and not—not—oh, I don't know. She has never been so sweet; why, there are times when she looks ideally lovely, when it seems as if something in her was just illuminating her face. That sounds silly, doesn't it? but it's exactly what I mean."

When he got up to go, a change in Airlie's manner impressed Regester curiously. "What is it?" he asked. "You want to say something."

"Yes, I do." But she hesitated. Then: "Do you remember once saying to me that the only possible solution for Kathie would be that she should marry again? Well"—she looked up at him bravely—"if *I* were a man I would not stand by and see her life spoiled." Then, with a

waved hand of farewell, she turned and disappeared up the staircase.

When she reached her room she sat down for a few moments and breathed hard.

"There, now, Airlie Casler, it's all over, and I'm glad. I've been a mean thing. I've wanted that man to love me. I've nearly lost my senses trying to ensnare his youthful affections. But he won't, he won't, and so I will be generous and relinquish him to Kathie." She trembled with laughter, but her eyes were full of tears. "Men with jaws like that marry any woman they want to, and Kathie will just *have* to marry him. Why, I'm an insignificant goose beside Kathie." She surveyed her desolate little figure in the glass. "Any man can see that. But he might have cared a—a—little bit." She slid down on the floor, leaning her head against the chair-seat. She was only twenty, and her heart was broken, but she was glad of it, for was not happiness commonplace, the portion of vulgar, contented souls?

But long after, she remembered those tears without any desire to make mock of them. She could not think of them without heart-ache.

The next day happened to be Friday, and Katharine saw Airlie off to the city with a sense of relief. She was quite aware that of late a fine

veil had been drawn between the girl and herself, but that was inevitable, and she would not spoil time by thinking about it. Airlie was as dear to her as ever; it was not as if they had quarrelled, yet, oddly enough, they were often quite as constrained as if they had. But time would right that.

The morning dragged itself through at last, and after luncheon she dressed herself with tremulous care, recalling her husband's old-time fancies with pathetic heed. What was it in herself, new to her, that she dimly felt, but would not, must not analyse. She stood for a moment in front of her pier-glass, leaning forward, pleading with the Katharine who fought against her, against this new Katharine, with bright eyes, and soft colour in cheeks that had so long been pale. Something strange, unknown in all her life before, had awakened in her, and was imperiously demanding recognition, supremacy; compared with it, the sweetness of her girlish love had been as the soft slipping of a silver stream through sun-bright sands. For now she felt herself borne along in the vehement heart of some furious torrent, which stayed not for rock or chasm or the cold, illimitable sea in the gray future toward which it plunged.

Yet, still she cried to herself, "Peace," where

she knew there was no peace, and in the night she awoke often to sudden conflict—that conflict that denied evasion in the darkness and silence that forced to the judgment all that the day concealed.

When she heard Mackemer's step on the walk her face flushed like a girl's, but no girl's eyes ever knew such depth of radiance as hers when she greeted him. But of that she was unconscious. She felt only the thrill, the golden flow of youth, the blossoming of her whole palpitant being into prodigal bloom once more. Tears? Ah, somewhere in the world there were tears, but not here—not here. Pain? She had forgotten what it felt like.

"Did you meet Whitney?" she asked Mackemer, in a voice that made him think of a silver flute.

"No, I didn't," he answered, as he hung up his hat in its old place. "And I have the chessmen for him. Such a hunt as I had for them! You would have supposed I should have no trouble in getting exactly what I wanted in this big city. He's a careful boy, and he'll keep them all his life, and I wanted them right."

"Ah, but you're a particular shopper," she said, as she took up her work. She was not fond of fancy work; her devotion to it was the re-

source of necessity when he was there; then she counted stitches and matched shades with a zeal worthy of great results.

He began to talk to her now of a law case which interested him personally, which was more than many of his cases did, explaining it to her minutely, enjoying the intelligence of her replies. She grasped his points clearly, and under the spell of her appreciation he talked rapidly, confidentially, delightfully, revealing himself to her with unconscious demand for sympathy.

"You know Bishop Thornton? I've been doing some legal work for him lately. Such a queer old chap. Perfect study. He came in the other morning, and said, with tears in his voice: 'Xerxes is dead, and he was the only thing that never crossed me.' I hadn't the least idea who or what Xerxes was, but I inquired, with sympathy, and discovered that it was a pet cat that had lived with him for twenty-eight years. It appears that the old fellow, not Xerxes, married an actor's daughter when he was about forty-five. I've seen her, and she undoubtedly inherited all her father's gift, but, luckily, she has been content to play her part on the diocesan stage with great skill. In fact, her part fits the woman to a dot, and she's clever enough to know she was cut out to act religion to a sinful world."

"Oh, oh!" protested Katharine.

"It's so, but unhappily her two sons have not only inherited their grandfather's ability, but hers, too, and they're simply mad to be actors, and that's about killing the old bishop. The elder boy is going to play with the 'Tinkling Cymbals' company this winter, but I think the other one, who is more pliable, is actually going to let himself be harried into the Church, and so a good actor will be spoilt."

"And his father's profession degraded by an unwilling servant."

"Yes. Well, I've done all I could. The old bishop is quite a speculator, and his business with me has concerned some of his deals, which, to tell you the truth, were pretty shaky. But, like most secretive people, under certain conditions, he'll tell you all his family affairs or anything else, and there isn't anything I don't know about the Thorntons now. He feels that it's strictly dignified to unfold himself to a lawyer, and such a luxury to be able to call his boys unsanctified names, even if he has to pay for the time it takes."

"But what part does Mrs. Thornton take in these struggles?" inquired Katharine.

"None that he can profit by. When he appeals to her, she calmly says: 'Henry, I will lay the matter before the Lord,' and goes off to a mis-

sionary convention and leaves the Lord and

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"I suppose it's easy to laugh when your knees aren't all broken to bits." It was evident that the rôle of stoical hero was beginning to pall, and by way of consolation Mackemer said:

"Never mind, old chap, here are your chessmen." Then he turned to Katharine. "Do you remember how fond you used to be of this?" he asked, as he pushed an odd-shaped, tiny flask toward her. "It's such an expensive perfume that it's hardly ever imported, but I ran across it the other day, and couldn't resist getting it. Perhaps I had better open it—it has a tricky cork." He was seized with fear that she might refuse it; once opened, that would be difficult.

Katharine watched him in silence. She was wondering in dismay just how not to accept his gift. Yet, when at last he held it out to her, she took it without a word, and unconsciously bent her head to inhale the exquisite fragrance.

Oh, the far-away sweetness of it! With deep, indrawn breath she closed her eyes, and in the instant lost herself upon the perilous memory of their earliest days together, when the intoxicating incense of his young passion had breathed bewitchment upon her heart. It was more than she could bear. The perfume of a handful of vanished violets revealed to her, as never before, the cruel, the overwhelming tragedy of her later

lot. She looked straight at Mackemer, and then the tears came, and she rose, blindly seeking a way of escape. But he held her, with touch insistent, authoritative.

"Whit, boy, run away," he said, in a low voice, "run away."

Whitney looked at his mother, and then slipped silently from the room, carrying his precious chess-men with him. He had grown up in an atmosphere calculated to make him a philosopher.

"Katharine!" said Mackemer, and then was silent.

She turned her face from him. The room grew dark between them.

"Katharine," he said again—after a long time.

"No, no! How could you?" The words rose hot in her throat. "How could you? No, I don't want to hear. It doesn't matter now. My life is ruined." She stepped far back from him. "No, do not speak to me. I have suffered enough."

"I know," he said, in a broken voice. "I do not ask you to forgive me."

"Forgive!" Her eyes blazed.

She turned away from him again, leaning against the wall behind her. There was a terrible

pathos in her attitude. But it passed. She faced him again. "You make a mistake. There is nothing to say. I would like you to go," she said, proudly, deliberately.

"Katharine—" he looked at her steadily—"since you ask that of me, it is all that I can do."

He reached the door. Was he to go forever out of her life—like this?

"Oh, Clifford!" The words broke from her in a sob. He turned back to her.

"You think that I—that I—don't care. Oh, Clifford!" She looked up at him helplessly. "No, no! Oh, I have done wrong. But, oh, you thought—you thought I didn't care." The tears poured over her face. "No, Clifford, don't say that. I can't bear it. You hurt me. It's all wrong. Clifford, you must go. Yes, I mean it."

Some time later, when Airlie reached home, she found Katharine still sitting there, alone.

"Whew! What a scrumptiferous perfume! Kathie, don't you want to give me that delirious little flask?"

"No."

"Why, what's the matter, Kathie mine? You look as if you had seen a vision. And tears, too. Now, Kathie, that comes of staying here all day moping, when you might have been down town with me, buying my hat. Such times and emo-

tions as I've had. I started out with the impression that fifteen dollars would be extravagance. I ended by wondering whether I could procure a decent sun-bonnet for the Forefathers' Day Festival for fifty. A hat that you may describe as chaste and elegant, if you're fond of telling lies, is about like this—a ribbon from the bargain counter, a feather from the barn-door fowl's tail, a quart of spangles that won't stay spangled, and half a pound of gaudy velvet, all stirred up with a pitch-fork, ready to pin on to your head for the modest fee of twenty-five dollars, and no extra charge for sewing silk or button-holes."

"Airlie, what did you get? Are you going to disgrace me?"

"No, dear. You'll want to wear a placard at the Festival stating, 'The girl in pink is a relative of mine,' when you behold me in all my glory. The foundations of the particular chapeau I finally selected to surmount my sunny curls are of pink velvet, the second story is ermine, and the third a noble black ostrich plume ensnared by a cluster of ten-cent diamonds, and I look like a dream in it, but Kathie, Kathie, my heart's broken."

"Airlie, what is it? Did the hat cost too much, dear?"

"The hat? Oh, Kathie, who cares for hats! Vecellio's gone."

"Gone?" exclaimed Katharine. "But how—where?"

"Well, I don't think he walked. Apparently he flew, and poor Madame, too. I don't for a moment believe that any avenger with eyes like swords hung around on street corners thirsting to spill his blood, as he told me yesterday, though I dare say a good many people would have liked their bills paid. But Vecellio lived in an operatic atmosphere, where they don't bother about little things like bills. And I'm sure that if a harmless butcher or baker or candlestick-maker wanted his bill paid, that could only represent itself to Vecellio as a dramatic thirst for his living gore. From Madame's own account, he is far too restless to stay in one place very long, and though he said to me the other day that to escape the Avenger he would have to fly into the 'owling wilderness'— Fiddlesticks! he was probably born in a crowd, and he'll see to it that he dies in one, for the sake of effect. Creeping mysteries are a joy to him. He has been intimating to me lately that he is the only son and noble heir of the great di Bimbleboni family, or something of that sort. For a long time I was afraid to tell him that I had never heard of the di Bimblebonis,

but at last I did, for I was dying to hear what he would say. He just jumped up and down with rage, and I laughed whenever I thought he needed a fresh stimulus. But he pinched me awfully that time. 'You, you! You t'ink you know, and you say you nevaire hear of di Bimbleboni. Then, you a little, little tonkey, and I not teach tonkeys how to seeng.' 'Very well,' I said, 'then I suppose I must go; good-by.' I actually got three steps down the stairs that time before he called after me. But, oh, Kathie, what a great master he was! I loved that bad little man."

"Yes, I know. He has done wonderful things for you, Airlie. But you know he said himself the other day that you could do without him now. And you said *yourself* that he had taught his methods threadbare to you."

"Yes, yes. But I feel as if a big prop had given way under my foundations. I went down and had a talk with Mrs. Crowther. He rented the flat from her. She said that he had paid her up, but that he owed money in every direction. She hadn't the least idea that he was going, but at the last moment, just when the hack came, Madame went to say good-by to her. She had been crying. I can't describe to you, Kathie, how pathetic everything looked. In the dining-room their chairs stood just as they had pushed them

back from the table, and their plates remained with the fragments of supper on them, and his glass of wine half finished. The music was all gone, and the piano closed, and across the dusty lid I wrote, 'Exit Ernesto Vecellio.' He was a dreadful little man, Kathie, but he made me a singer. When he said I would be great, he lied, and he knew it, but it was a nice lie, and I liked it. I feel just as I did when I was eight years old and my dog Fizz died. I buried him in a soap-box, and I wished it would only hold me."

Katharine looked at her strangely. "Oh, Air-lie, child, what little griefs!" she said.

CHAPTER XIV

LATE one afternoon, just as he was thinking that it was nearing the dreaded home-going time, Mackemer was told that a young lady wished to see him. "She won't give her name, sir. She says that you do not know her."

"Well, show her in," said Mackemer. But the moment his visitor stepped across the threshold, his quick memory identified her as the young lady he had seen long ago in the restaurant with Whitney, and therefore the cousin of whom he had since heard so much.

"Miss Casler," he remarked, as she bowed with a great deal of formality.

"Yes, Miss Casler," rejoined Airle, sharply. His quickness happened to displease her.

"And to what may I attribute the—the—" he hesitated, and the expression of his face changed suddenly. "Oh, is there anything wrong at Glendedge—are Whitney and—?" He looked helplessly at Airle.

"Katharine and Whitney are quite well," she

answered, calmly. "Katharine has no idea that I am here. I came to please myself."

Mackemer found it impossible to repress a smile. But Airlie remained severe. She did not mean to be captured by this alluring demon's wiles. She knew all about his smile and his exquisitely tempered voice, and she hardened her heart.

"It's like this. I wanted to see you for myself, so that I might understand," she began, slowly. He looked at her sharply. "Because of Katharine," she added. His eyes grew suddenly cold. "There are some things that I know, that you don't, but I am going to tell you about them."

"Please, don't," he said, quietly. This was impertinence unbearable. But the next moment he added: "No, you may go on. I see you will in the end, and it will be as well to save time."

"It's quite hard," said Airlie. "Because, perhaps, you think I like to interfere. Well, I don't. But if *I* don't, who will? And somebody must."

Mackemer's level eyebrows lifted slightly. But Airlie was not to be daunted. She stood up, to fortify herself in her determination by feeling her feet firm beneath her. "You must not come to see Katharine any more. And I'm going to tell you why." Mackemer felt himself abjectly helpless in the clutch of this desperate, deter-

mined child upon whom he could not fall with fierce, free fist. "Dr. Regester wants to marry Katharine. Don't you see how cruel it is of you to prevent that? In a little while she would be so happy, and he would be good to Whit. Don't you want Katharine to be happy? Do you like her to be miserable and lonely?"

She waited for Mackemer to say something, but he sat unresponsive, listlessly chewing the end of his pen, his eyes fixed on a far corner of the room.

"I hope you aren't angry with me. I know I have taken a great liberty," stammered Airlie, with a sudden impression that she had been a fool. "But I couldn't help it. I have been so worried. I had to come and tell you."

"I do not doubt that your motives are altogether admirable, Miss Casler. Is there anything more that you wished to say?"

"No. Isn't that enough?" she flashed at him.

"Quite enough, thank you." He held out his hand to her. "It's a beautiful day, isn't it, but cold?"

Something in his eyes, in the face looking at the moment so terribly sensitive, cut her to the quick.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she cried, impulsively.

"Good-by," he said, in his charming voice.

The office-door closed behind her; Mackemer was left alone.

The determined smile died from his eyes; he felt again the fierce throb behind his eyeballs which had seemed to blind him when Airlie said: "Dr. Regester wants to marry Katharine."

To marry Katharine! How dare the man think of such a thing? Why, Katharine was his.

But had *she* ever contemplated such a step? He could not believe it. Katharine give herself to another man? Why, she was his wife!

To speak of Regester in the same breath with her—it was profanation. Why, if he lost her now, out of his life—! He laid his head low on his desk; terrible tears burned themselves slowly out in his eyes.

Late that night he finished a letter which reached her the next afternoon, just as Regester said something to her—something that should have brooked no interference. Yet she said: "Oh, will you forgive me just a moment—while I look at this?"

He waited, watching her. She glanced through the letter, her face flushing, then pale, her delicate hands quivering. Then she looked up at him.

"You were saying—" she began, vaguely—she held her letter closely, covetously. "You

were saying—" Then she understood, and anger and humiliation overwhelmed her. "How could you?" she added, in a smothered voice. "How could you?" She felt as if in one devastating moment the bloom had been brushed from something hidden and sacred within herself.

"Wait," said Regester. "There are some things I will say to you."

"You never shall!" she exclaimed, looking at him with hostile eyes. "I won't be talked to. Oh, we have been such good friends——"

"Friends!" he echoed, scornfully.

"Yes, you're angry, of course. Very well, then I will tell *you* something. I will not have you think as you are thinking of me now. I have not let you give me so much, and given you nothing in return." Her face crimsoned, but she looked at him steadily. "I have cared for you so much—I have valued all that is noble in you so highly, that I have always realised how easy it would be to love you, how happy I might be if—if— But that couldn't be; I am not to be happy. I don't even want to be. I can't afford to be. Clifford *is* my husband. I *am* his wife. My life is bound up with his. Marriage is not an incident, which to-day occurs, and to-morrow can be denied. Could my child ever be a mere

incident in my life? Then, neither can my marriage. It is a fact which cannot be obliterated by decree, and you know it. Oh, how strange and dreadful all this is! Some day you will look back and realise all the self-sacrifice that was involved in what you have said to me. And there must be no self-sacrifice in the love with which a man asks a woman to marry him—no argument.”

“Yet in your thought of your husband there is nothing but sacrifice.”

“That is another thing,” she answered, quickly. “After marriage there is always sacrifice. There must be, if it is to be what it should be. But not before. Oh, no, no!”

She looked at him with clear beautiful eyes, which softened with such tenderness as he had never seen in them before.

“You have done the greatest thing for me to-day that a man can ever do for a woman. You were willing to sacrifice your life for me, and not because you love me. No, no, you don’t.” She laid her hand timidly on his arm. “I want to tell you something, but I’m so frightened. How is it that you don’t understand yourself—how could you persuade yourself that you love me? Don’t you know—don’t you see for yourself that it’s——”

The door opened with a rush, and Airlie came

in with Whitney. "Well, of all things on earth, Whit, just look at your mother and this doctor-man squared up to each other in the twilight like a pair of prize-fighters! Wait until I light up, and we'll see them have it out. But Kathie, where's that man? Gone? Not much, if it's me—I, I, I—that's after him." She flew out and stopped Regester just as he cleared the steps.

"Come back! I want to tell you something awfully."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Oh, a—a—patient."

"Oh, another collar-bone?" inquired Airlie. "Dear me, how glad I am to see you developing this feverish interest in your patients! Oh, you may go, but just see me do this skirt-dance first. I spent a whole hour catching the accomplishment from a girl to-day." She drifted bewitchingly up and down the wide piazza. "There! Doesn't that rouse in your breast thoughts that lie too deep for jeers?" she asked, breathlessly, and then disappeared in a whirl indoors.

"What were you doing, Airlie?" asked Katharine.

"Skirt-dancing, dearest. I thirst, I faint, I long to shock that grave young paragon's soul.

He ought to be put in a frame, and labelled, 'Edward Regester, Archangel. Hands off!' Oh, you can't think what fun I had coming out to-day, Kathie. There was a man on the train with a parrot, and you may be sure it wasn't long before I got myself in the next seat to the outfit, for there's nothing on earth I love quite as much as any old parrot, except a monkey. Naturally I asked at once if the brute could swear, and the man said, oh, no, he was trying to bring it up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. At that the parrot went off like a gun, 'Praise God from whom all—' and then stopped as if he had swallowed a cork. I asked him presently what his name was, Whit, and he said, with great dignity and one eye shut, 'Montmorency.' I said that wasn't Scriptural, and he said, 'Go 'way back and sit down. I don't like girls. Hallelujah!' Of course, nearly every man in the car came to look at that fowl, and I simply had the best kind of a time. No, I'm not going out to-night, Kathie. I was to sing at the Geoffrey Caddingtons', but she was taken providentially ill to-day, and as I shall get my money all the same, I'm not depressed."

So they had a quiet evening together, but at the end of it there came a thunder-clap for which Katharine was quite unprepared.

"Kathie, did that man, that doctor-man, ask you to marry him to-day?"

"Why, Airlie, child!"

"Kathie, did he?"

"Oh, my dear, how can you——"

"Did he, Kathie?"

Katharine was silent. It seemed to her very clear at that moment that there were some questions which no woman should ever ask another. And as the minutes went by she began to realise what harm Airlie's question, answered or unanswered, was certain to do. Here was a dilemma indeed, just as she had been congratulating herself that she had played the part of Providence in a most delicate manner.

"Airlie!" The girl slipped off the couch and came over and kissed Katharine with dull lips.

"Oh, Kathie, I'm awfully glad," she said, sweetly. "I knew it was bound to come sooner or later. Anyone could see that."

"Airlie, you are thinking things that are all wrong," protested Katharine, vehemently. "Dr. Regester does not love me. He never could."

"My dearie, men beings don't propose to women unless they want to. But never mind explaining the case to me, Kathie. Why in the world should you?" The young blue eyes looked into Katharine's as clear and hard as polished steel.

"Because I want to, and because I will. That man is one among ten thousand, child. He persuaded himself that he was willing to—to—marry me, because he thinks—oh, Airlie, all sorts of strange things. He thinks I do not understand, but I do. Child, he is the loyalest friend that any woman ever had, but he knows at this very minute that such a marriage would have been a farce for him some day. I was angry with him. He hurt me. I thought he ought to know me better than to think of me like that, and if he had dared to love me as you think, I should have hated him and myself too. But he is good and noble—he would have sacrificed himself for me—but, child, I think he had a revelation while I talked to him." She looked at the girl with shining eyes. "Some men find out what love is so slowly."

"Let's forget the brutes," said Airlie, fervently. "Everything's their fault. I hate them, and they hate me. Let's talk of more profitable things." And she began to plan with enthusiasm what she would do if she had a million dollars.

But when Katharine crept in late that night to tuck her up as Airlie always liked her to do, there were tears on her face in spite of her deep childish sleep.

Katharine went back to her own room and

sat still for a long time in the darkness. She had reached the parting of the ways, and she knew it. What was she to say to-morrow when her husband came? In the silence she gauged as never before those subtleties in her character which bound good with evil, sacrifice with selfishness, love with fear. Was she a good woman, the woman that Airlie and Regester thought her? She shivered with fear of herself, with fear of those passionate forces newly aflame in her heart.

The next day was cold and blustery, a rude announcement of the nearing winter; there was a blazing fire on the hearth beside which Katharine waited. Her face was brilliant with unusual colour, and in her dull red gown with its ripples of ivory lace she made a picture good for a man's eyes to look upon. But she greeted Mackemer with ceremony, offering him her hand for the first time in the many that they had now met, and he at once recognised a curious repulse in this. But he had not come to-day to be rebuffed, and he did not keep her long in suspense as to the exact meaning of his call.

"I heard on Tuesday," he said, looking at her with the eyes that she loved in her child, "that you were likely to marry Dr. Regester. Katharine, what have you done that anyone could feel justified in saying such a thing as that?" He

had not meant to speak like this, but the temptation to accuse mastered him. "Why, Katharine, it is not possible. But you have let him come here—you must have seen— Oh, Katharine, I have believed in you so! Oh, how I have believed in you!"

She was silent.

"You don't know, you can't understand, what your faith and your loyalty have been to me. I have counted heavily on the thought of it—I have lived on it. And I can't live without it." He paused, held by the strange expression of her eyes. A sad little smile crossed her face.

"Oh, Katharine, how can you smile? You don't understand, you don't see that you have grown to be everything to me, my faith, my religion, that without the thought of you, unchanged, unchanging, always true, why, without that, Katharine, Katharine, there is nothing—it is all black to me. I will go away if you wish, I will never come to see you again, if I may only know that you—that you—are mine." His voice sank to a whisper; then suddenly rose as he added: "But if you marry that man, then you are no better than I am. Don't you see that?"

"Yes," she answered, quietly.

He stared at her in bewilderment. "Oh, Katharine, what have I said to you? It was a

lie. But if you do—Katharine, if you do—marry him—there will seem to me to be nothing enduring and worth believing in in this world. That is all.”

“Clifford!” She held out her hand to him.

“Oh, Katharine, my wife, my wife!”

There was a long silence. Then she began to stroke his hair with tender mother-touch, and at last she said, in the saddest voice: “But it was easy to believe me ready to be untrue.”

“I know, I know,” he murmured, brokenly. “But when I am away from you I lose my grip. I thought I should go mad last night. You can’t understand how I see it—all the wrong that I have done you. Why, Katharine, when I’m away from you I know what it is to be a lost soul.”

She looked at him with miserable eyes. For after all, what had she to say? There was that in the background of which she steadily refused to think, but it was there, as bitter and as insistent as death. But he was her husband, her own. If repentance had come, if he loved her as he had never loved her before, how could she sit there silent in a crisis like this? Her heart swelled with tenderness such as she had never known for him before—a pitying, forgiving, enfolding affection, as different from her girl-

hood's love as seed from flower. This was not the lover over whom her heart had romanced in those far-off days. This was a man who had sinned grievously and suffered, who was only now developing all that was noble and strong in his character.

Her soul was starved for the divinely free expression of all that is most sacred between man and woman—for that which needs neither word nor body to make itself known. But with that hunger, that passion, heightening in her from moment to moment, she sat there, so near to him, as mute as death.

"Oh, Katharine!" he exclaimed, in an agony he could not control, "what can I do? My soul is in hell. My soul is in hell."

With a sob she sprang to her feet, and taking his two hands in hers, she laid them against her cheek, with a gesture all-protecting, maternal. But after the moment's first joy of it, he drew back from her.

"No, dear; no," he said, brokenly.

"You don't love me?" she asked, with a woman's swift irrational alarm.

"Love you!" he repeated. "Oh, Katharine, Katharine!"

CHAPTER XV

“**K**ATHIE, I want to have a soul to soul talk with you,” said Airlie. “And I shall make you very angry, furious. I want you to understand that I know that clearly beforehand. I’m quite sure that by the time I’ve said the last word I shall have to go over and arrange to board at Mrs. Payne’s. It will be awful, but I shall have to endure it. I shall always have to try to be living up to my reputation for honesty there, because you know, she’s the woman who said to me, when I returned the five dollars she gave me in mistake for one, for the Open Air Fund: ‘Dear me! What a very honest person you must be, Miss Casler!’ And she’s the woman who always prides herself on saying to her children, ‘Be happy, dears,’ instead of, ‘Now, don’t do that, progeny.’ Though I think that she’s got hold of a finer principle in that than you’d expect in one of her smushy brains. I met her yesterday morning, and she told me such a good story on Mr. Payne. You know he’s an awful Y. M. C. A. crank, and it appears that the secretary of that organisation

rushed up to him on the platform just as he got off a train which the secretary was going to take, and asked him to take part in what he breathlessly described as a social meeting at the hall. 'But what do you want me to do?' shouted Mr. Payne, closing in on the secretary's escaping coat-tail as it boarded the train. 'Oh, anything—read, or—or—or, you know, good-by-e-e-e.' Naturally, Mr. Payne arrived late at the meeting, just in time to catch, 'M-m-m-h, by Mr. Payne.' He hurried up and read some choice selections from the Dooley arabesques, and you know, Kathie, he does that kind of thing awfully well, for like most people who suffer from piety, he has to let a tuck out somewhere, and comic readings are his form of dissipation. Well, he noticed that the audience acted as if they were paralysed at first, and then ended by collapsing on the seats in convulsions, and he felt tremendously flattered by their appreciation, until the secretary, who is a painstaking and matter-of-fact person, led him away and explained to him sadly that by 'read' he had meant the Scriptures, of course, 'and really, you know, Mr. Payne, to read those—those—things when I had just announced that we would now be led in prayer and the reading of the Scriptures by Mr. Payne!' Now, Kathie, after all this by way of

preliminary, do you begin to feel in a fantod, because I promise you I'm going to stir up an awful sterriage?"

"If I knew the proper sensations of a fantod, and the ingredients of a sterriage, I might answer you to more purpose," said Katharine. She wished herself anywhere at this moment but alone with Airlie.

"Aren't they dear words? I heard an English girl use them the other day, and I at once consecrated them to my service."

"Airlie, what is it you want to say?" asked Katharine, suddenly.

Airlie gasped in a hurry. "Oh, my dear, how can I? I'm so afraid of you when you look like this. But you have no father or mother"—the girl's eyes twinkled for a moment—"and someone must speak, and there's no one but Airlie." She laid her hand on Katharine's arm. "Oh, Kathie, why do you let him come here? Don't you see it's frightful? It's all wrong. Why, what are you thinking of, dear? Don't you see it can't go on like this? And you aren't happy. Don't you know how thin you're getting? I'm just distracted worrying about you, Kathie."

"Airlie, you must not talk to me like this. I have nothing to say to you, dear."

There was a cold finality in Katharine's man-

ner which forbade further argument, and Airlie sighed and went away heavy-hearted, to practise for a students' concert, where she was expected to be very gay. She would have been glad to talk to Regester, but he no longer came to the house as he had done, and when she met him he seemed to have nothing to say to her, and no time to spare. Once she was sure she had caught sight of him at the Church of the Holy Heart, but she proved to herself elaborately that she had been mistaken. Now she was singing there no longer, having been offered a better position elsewhere, with the distinction of belonging to the finest quartet in the city. But life had somehow lost its roseate tinge for her. That was because Vecellio was gone, she argued. She still felt for him the attachment of a brilliant pupil for a great master, but what a little trickster he had been, after all! She knew well enough now that she would never be Patti the second, or any other sort of opera queen, but for that very reason she valued the gifts she had with the utmost keenness, and was determined to make the most of them. Sometimes it occurred to her that she was a business woman first, and an artist next, but she consoled herself with the thought that the combination in that order was sufficiently rare to be tenderly cherished.

She took pains to avoid Mackemer, but once she passed him on the path as he left the house, and on another occasion she opened the library door to find him and Katharine listening with the moment's smiles to some tale of Whitney's. "Quite *en famille*," she said to herself, as she closed the door with a snap. "Well, if they like to fool with fire, they needn't expect me to blow it up for them."

She practised her songs patiently this morning, but when she had finished she ran back to the library. "Kathie," she began, abruptly, "it's borne in upon me more strongly than ever that you're a fool, and that I'll be faithless if I don't tell you so. You're a poor, God-forsaken fool, and I'm sorry for you."

Her words hardly made a ripple among Katharine's thoughts. She had given up thinking about so many things, and when her husband came to see her she was conscious only of a deep content; she sent him back to Isabel each time with a serenity which completely deceived her. She was the keeper of his soul; the rest was nothing. Her attitude became the amazement and despair of Mackemer. It was inevitable that in time he should take but one view of a question so vital as the ultimate relation of a man and a woman who had once been husband

and wife, and who admitted now a stronger love for each other than they had dreamed of before. In thought he was only Katharine's husband now, but in deed he was forced by her to remain Isabel's; he was nauseated with horror of the man who still acted the husband's part to her, with what torture God only knew.

"And yet you say you do not acknowledge divorce," he argued with Katharine.

"Divorce!" she exclaimed. A smile curled her lip; she looked at him with glowing eyes. How could a mere document free from each other two lives which had once been fused by a marriage of love, a supreme mystery but now understood and recognised? And Whitney? He was the visible seal of a bond written not upon parchment, but on human hearts.

"Ah, you don't admit it, and you do," he said, wearily.

Tears came to Katharine's eyes. "Oh, Clifford, can't you understand? You took Isabel, and you must stand by her. I cannot see it otherwise, but I cannot argue it. I feel the rightness of that. That is all I can tell. But you must love me."

Indeed it seemed to him that his love for Katharine deepened each time that he saw her. He did not realise that in this quiet time, the

lull between two great storms, every quality that was adorable, every charm that was most bewitchingly feminine in her, was unconsciously struggling to make itself most alluringly manifest to him.

He had lately made a new friend, a young fellow operating on the Board, with the face of a St. John, and a soul vibrant with mysticism. In leaving his office one day Rodney threw a little book on the desk. "There, Mackemer, read that. You'll like it, old boy, if you only give it a chance to sink in."

When he was gone Mackemer picked the book up, and read the title with a smile: "The Practice of the Presence of God," by Brother Lawrence. But the phrase lingered in his ear, and by and by as the longing grew upon him to purify himself, that Katharine might not perceive in him the degradation that he loathed, he came strangely under the domination of the little book. The depravity of temperament that had come to him through his mother—the weaker, immoral, yet emotionally religious qualities—began to yield to his inheritance from his father, that strange inheritance in such a character—of asceticism, righteousness. His father had gone out of life with his strong heart broken by his lovely little wife's duplicities, unthinking that he

had bequeathed to his boy the battle within himself of their two characters.

It was nearing Christmas again when Mackemer went out to Glenedge one snowy night, in a mood at which he himself wondered. He had borne patiently with his wife as long as he could; he had reached the limit of endurance. Yet when he found himself once more with Katharine he watched silently her slender white fingers busy with some crimson wool; he noticed her loose wedding-ring. There was no colour in her face to-night, and the delicate outline of her cheek and chin impressed him—frightened him. The dark rings of wayward hair loose on her brow seemed to heighten the pallor of a face with the purity of a saint upon it. A tempest-tide of emotion rushed in upon him. He did not want her to look like that. She was too far from him, he wanted her near, near, Katharine, his wife. He had worshipped her afar off long enough. He could not bear this any longer. It must end.

She was his. She had owned it. He had been a fool not to vanquish her when love had found voice on her lips. He would wait no more.

“Katharine, I am going to leave Isabel.”

“No, Clifford.” She spoke imperiously.

What madness was it in her, that would chain him to the woman who had been his undoing?

"Clifford, if you leave her, you can never see me again. If you leave her, I shall have separated you from her just as she separated you from me. I will never do that. You owe her a duty because the law recognises her as your wife. You are not considered to owe me any, but I have your love. That is enough."

He hardly listened to her. He felt so strong. He would bend and break her to his will.

"I am going to leave her," he repeated. "But why should I tell you that? It does not concern you—now."

She looked at him in alarm. "It does concern me. Why can't you see it as I do? If you leave Isabel you will part yourself forever from me."

Of all the incomprehensible women! He stared at her, hot with anger. "Katharine, you talk like a child. If I leave Isabel, it will be—some day—to come back to you."

She drew away from him. "You can never come back to me," she said, in a low voice. "Oh, I have done wrong. And I have been so happy, so happy."

"Katharine, what is the matter with you?" he asked, bluntly. "Do you know that I have sometimes thought that on this question your own

moral sense was in danger of becoming obscured. I cannot get your point of view."

She looked at him so wistfully. Between them there was a great gulf fixed, which he could not see. And she felt that they were more pitifully divided because he could not see it than by any other fact.

"Katharine, you have said that you love me in spite of all. I have thought"—his voice trembled, and, trembling, it played upon her heart with a master-touch—"that your love was God's sign to me of forgiveness."

She could not trust herself to speak.

"Katharine, how can you withhold yourself from me?"

"Clifford, I cannot give you any more—it must be enough—that I love you still."

"It is heaven—with you," he said, with imperious eyes upon her.

"See, it is like this," she began, gently. "I have such strange feelings about it all, but I know they are right. And I will not deny them. I want you to see it as I do. I cannot bear it if you don't. Can't you see that it is precisely marriage, marriage again for you and me that would be the fall for me, and at last again for you? Oh, yes!" she protested, vehemently. "There is always Isabel. She can never be left out. Oh,

I know so much more about this than you do. I feel so many things that I cannot explain. Isabel loves you—yes, loves. Her love for you is her salvation. It is the greatest good she knows. Will I snatch that from her? Could you and I live happy, peaceful lives with the thought of Isabel somewhere in the darkness, lost?"

He was a long time silent. Then he said, hoarsely. "And what is the future for me?"

"Clifford, what was the past to me?" It was her last reproach.

"Katharine, forgive me," he cried. "I am a brute to you."

"No, no," she whispered, looking at him with wet, beautiful eyes.

He began again. "For Whitney's sake—Katharine, I thought that for the boy's sake, you would see—" She stopped him with a gesture.

Her face grew strangely stern. "If for nothing else, for my boy's sake, I would never dare attempt to right one wrong by another."

"Then I am never again to have my wife, my child, my home," he said, slowly. "I deserve that. I must go back to Isabel. I deserve to. And I shall never see you again." His voice broke.

"Why?" The question was a storm upon her lips.

He turned upon her fiercely. "You ask why? Katharine, is that all you understand of it?"

Ah, but she had not meant that! If she kept him true to Isabel, she had expected to sustain a supreme and exalted relationship to him, beside which the loftiest type of marriage should fade into pale insignificance. To her mystical fancy it had figured as a foretaste of that state in which there shall be no giving in marriage.

"I must go," he said, dully. She gave him her hand mechanically. It was like ice, poor little hand, but his warm comforting grasp was not for it.

He looked down at her—the mystery that she was to him, white as death, still, silent, unconquered.

"Katharine, how can you let me go like this?" he cried, in a last extremity of appeal. "You know that you are sending me away from you—that I am never coming back—that I cannot—because I love you too well?"

"Wait a moment," she breathed. "Yes, I must say something. I do not want to give you up. You are mine—mine. But I must, Clifford, I must. I see it all now." Ah, but he was still there beside her! "There is no other way. I have hated Isabel. If the devil would have struck her dead, I would have prayed to him to

do it. But I will not hate her any more." Her lip quivered pitifully; the effort to be calm made fearful demand upon her. "No, no, Clifford. I never want you to come back. You never must. But you must never, never—forget—me."

He went out into the darkness, away from her, with a groan. When he reached the road, he looked back, and saw her, still standing there, under the glow of the amber light, tall and slender as a fair Annunciation lily. And there came back to him what he had once said to her: "Katharine, you and I are not yet as the angels in Heaven." But looking at her now, for the last time, with the agony of separation entering into his soul, he felt that in God's sight she was.

CHAPTER XVI

IT was close to midnight when Mackemer took the elevator for his luxurious little flat on the third floor of the Engaletcheff. The heavy, perfumed air which enveloped him like a visible fog as he stepped inside affected him disagreeably. He had lately grown afraid of the discovery of his visits to Katharine, and as a precautionary measure he had adopted the plan of taking the train as far as Rose Hill and from there driving on to Glenedge, following the same course on his return.

To-night even the soiled city was pure and white beneath the still falling snow, and during the quiet drive to Rose Hill, as the road strayed for a long mile through the solemn, pillared woods, silent save for the rattling of bare bough and the rustle of dead leaf, he had risen at last into the nobility of Katharine's mood. The darkness was bright to him with the abiding vision of her face aureoled against the gloom.

There was still upon him the thrill of a worshipper rising from a prayer of devotion before some saint-sacred shrine when he found himself

at home again, there in his own library, with the open page of the book he had been reading before he went out, still waiting for him. In the room beyond he heard Isabel laugh that rich, full laugh which had once bewitched his ear. He pushed the portière aside and went in.

Isabel had been singing somewhere, and she sat now just as she had thrown herself down when she came in, with a red, fur-lined opera-cloak falling back from her superb shoulders. The man beside her held a cigar in his fingers—he had forgotten to light it in finding her attractive.

"Come, you must go!" she exclaimed, saucily, to him. "I don't want you a moment more now that I have him." She held out her hand to Mackemer, with a swift glance at him from beneath her narrowed lids. "Oh, I'm so glad you're home, dear. Come and kiss me."

Howard Cutts laughed softly. He thought her deviltry delicious. But was the husband a fool to be hoodwinked like that?

Mackemer flushed, and Isabel did not wait for him. She ran over and held up her cheek to him and he kissed her, but there was no light in his eyes. Isabel knew why.

"Do you know what?" she cried, holding on to the lapels of his coat, and swaying lightly to

and fro, "You're the handsomest man on earth, and I love you—whew! Now will you go?" she asked, looking over her shoulder at Howard Cutts. You are entirely *de trop*, my friend."

He went. But, ah! that was a woman worth while. She deserved a history and he was now quite ready to assist her in making it.

"Isn't he a pitiful fool?" said Isabel, as soon as the door closed. "He's awfully in love with me, and so kind and condescending about it. He doesn't in the least perceive that I've been kind to him because I wanted to use him. I should never have got in with the Aspenleiters and the Mains if it hadn't been for him. But I don't need him any more, and I'll have to drop him pretty soon, for I see he's going to be troublesome. He doesn't believe for a moment, you know, that I really mean I love you. Little fool!"

Mackemer was silent.

"What's the matter, darling? You look dead tired." She studied him seriously for a moment and then smiled. "I know. Why, Clifford, you're jealous, jealous of that pug." She laughed charmingly. "Why, dear boy, you're worth ten thousand of him to me. But do you know you frighten me sometimes now. You're so serious and you don't love me enough. Have you been

losing money, dear? You leave me alone so much. You mustn't. If you do, other men won't." She nodded her head at him gravely. "And you're getting all wrinkly. Why, you'll be an old man soon if you keep on." She smoothed his forehead with her finger. "But you must love me enough, darling, because I adore you." She bent toward him, alluring as the Lorelei, her pose an appeal, her lips burning red caresses for his, her strange eyes suing him in passionate entreaty. "Just think! That little horror kissed me to-night. There, on my shoulder. Look! What? Oh, you mustn't say, 'Mon Dieu,' in English, sweetheart. That's naughty. Next time I shall slap him. On my shoulder! But it is a beautiful shoulder, isn't it?" She leaned down to the level of a little mirror, and admired herself with studied, intentional frankness.

She knew the value of her flesh. She always had known it. That thought enlightened so much of his past to Mackemer in this torturing moment.

"But you know I like to be kissed like that —by you," she added, naïvely.

Mackemer held her away from him with a gesture.

"Oh, Isabel, wait a moment," he cried.

He had not thought to come down from the mountain so soon. But while he had listened to her, her odious inferences had revealed to him the depths of bitterness to which he was condemned. In a clear, cruel light he saw the horrors of the future that awaited her apart from him. She loved him; he knew it, even while from his heights above her he might discriminate against her type of the emotion called love. He felt for himself a loathing unutterable, for of such was the passion in exchange for whose joys he had offered up his soul.

Miles away, under the snow, he remembered now a lonely grave, in which there lay a little child, his and Isabel's. He felt again its baby fingers clinging to his own, and with that memory there rushed over him a flood of shame. He saw it again as he had last looked at it, in its cold, white casket, the little face forever still, and in its silence an awful accusation. Somewhere in the Universe of God, that child of his waited for him; nay, day by day it called him to the judgment-seat. But it was not before some distant God that he was summoned to appear; he was himself his Judge, and he felt terror of the voice within which passed sentence upon him. For he was to redeem Isabel, not in his way, but in hers.

Katharine? He could have sobbed aloud.

He looked up at Isabel with a wan smile. "Dear, forgive me. I'm dull, but I'm so tired. Be good to me."

She nestled close to him. "You love me?" she asked, insistently.

"Better than I ever loved you before," he said, in a tone that brought the tears to her eyes. It was inexplicable to her—this terrible love that she had for him. But it had never cost her a tear before.

"Isabel, I want you to be—different," he said, after a long time. "I want you—to be—good, dear."

She burst into laughter. "Why, Clifford, where have you been? At a revival meeting? You never asked me to be good before."

"No, I didn't begin that way," he answered.

She turned from him impatiently. "Dear, you are not amusing."

And in a flash he saw before them a future embittered and vulgarised by petty quarrels and odious recriminations. That at least must never be.

But as day after day passed, Isabel watched and wondered. There was a great change in Mackemer, but what was it?

"You haven't seen Whitney for an age, have you?" she said, abruptly, one morning.

"It seems an age," he answered.

"I wish he could come here. Couldn't he, sometimes?"

Mackemer was silent. He hardly heard her.

"Ah, you think it's not a fit place," she burst out in anger unexpected to herself. "You think I'm not fit. And I dare say you think I really hate him."

Mackemer leaned over and laid his hand gently on her arm. "Isabel, I know you would always be good to Whitney. You have the kindest heart in the world, and there isn't anything you wouldn't do for me, is there?"

She felt the strange tears in her eyes again. What was the matter? He was more tender, more deferential to her than ever before, but something had died in him. Her thoughts flew eagle-winged to Katharine. She would have been afraid now, if he had ever loved her, but no! he never had. She knew that. It must be the passing of his youth, and the coming of that colder age she so much dreaded. Still, if he only loved her! And he did—in spite of this new remoteness, she was sure of it. After all, she would not mind his being a bit of a saint. There was a certain piquancy about that; she relied upon herself to counteract a too excessive piety in him. Really, it was amusing. It ap-

peared that she must masquerade henceforth under a becoming show of middle-aged virtues, and if there were times when it took all the patience of her love for him to endure his nonsense, well—she must laugh in her sleeve, when she wore one, which apparently she must do more frequently than hitherto.

“Do you like me?” she asked, one evening, when she came in ready for a concert at which she was to sing. He looked at her in amazement. Her gown was an absolutely unadorned, faultlessly fitted black satin, finished under her chin and at her wrists without even a ripple of lace. Her red hair and her exquisite colouring had never shown in such striking effect before, and as she well knew, not one woman in a thousand could have risked appearance on a platform in such rank simplicity of costume.

“Well, tell me! Don’t I look like a nun? You’d like me to be a nun, you cross, straight-laced old darling, wouldn’t you?”

He smiled. “Yes, I like it, but you don’t deceive me into thinking that you look in the least like a nun.”

She made a gesture of despair. “And I tried so hard! Listen! I’m going to sing Vecellio’s ‘Betrayal’ to-night. I heard that little Casler girl sing it the other day.”

She went to the piano, and after an introduction of the weirdest music, haunted by the torment of a most elusive melody, there came a group of heavy major chords, breaking abruptly into the minor, and then her voice in the song:

“I fled Him down the nights and down the days ;
I fled Him down the arches of the years ;
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind ; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped ;
And shot, precipitated
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.”

When she had finished, she did not wait for a word from Mackemer, but turned quickly, and knelt down beside him, laying her head against his arm. “When I sing it, I shall think of you,” she whispered. Of him! He stroked her hair with fingers that suffered. “It’s a great song,” he said, in a strange tone.

CHAPTER XVII

THE winter weeks went aching by without a word from Mackemer; but that was only what Katharine had demanded of him. Perhaps she had not suspected the strength of that new growth of character which was taking place in him, yet she had believed herself meaning what she had said. She had counted heavily on the support which her high resolves would bring her, and before him it had been joy to wear her crown of renunciation, but alone, she only felt the pressure of its thorns. She shrank now from her solitary future with a sickening fear for herself. She had sent him away from her, and he loved her, but in time he would forget. She had bidden him be true to another woman, whose moral claim upon him she had steadily denied. Peace? How could she find it in such a tangled misery of sin and suffering as this?

And yet, alone in the night darkness, beneath the raging of the storm, she heard ever the still small voice which claimed empire in her soul,

and these fearful vigils ended in submission to its imperial decree.

But Katharine saw Mackemer again. She had gone wearily down town to dispose of a neglected accumulation of necessary shopping, and as she approached one of the stores she saw him come out, in deferential escort of his wife. Isabel looked radiant in her velvet and furs—a woman overflowing with health and spirits, carelessly confident of the admiration of every man's eyes. As Mackemer held open the door for her to pass out, she threw her head back and smiled into his face. "Oh, you dear," she said, gaily, "it was lovely of you to get me that." She had seen Katharine, but he had not. He murmured something in response, and they were gone.

Katharine hurried into the store and found a vacant seat, into which she sank, unable to think or care until the terrible beat of her heart was stilled. Ah, she could not bear this! To see him like that, with such a woman! for in her misery she did full justice to Isabel's superb equipment of flesh and blood.

Why, she had enshrined him, her lover, in her heart, and now she saw him as he really was, another woman's husband, bound to her by what they called law, owing her his devotion, yielding her his protection, and yet— No, no! not lov-

ing her—loving only his Katharine, his wife in the eyes of God. And that woman dared flout her, dared triumph in her blindness, unknowing that she owed her husband to the wife who had sent him back to her.

She got up at last and finished her purchasing with a face of stone, and then went home and sat through the evening with Whitney—restless, happy-hearted Whitney, so like his father that it was almost torture to her to look at him.

“Oh, I’m so glad it’s winter time, and that I can’t ride my bicycle, mother. I don’t enjoy it nearly as much as I should like to, for when I fly down the street I just know how every boy feels who looks at me, if he hasn’t got one himself. And then I hate myself for having what they haven’t. And I can’t lend it to them, for even quite nice boys don’t ride your bicycle the way they would if it was their own. There’s a Scotch boy staying up at the Galbraiths’. Such a funny boy, but he’s all right, too. I asked him what his father did, and he said he was a barrister, and I said to Reg Coleman afterward, I thought it was a pity such a nice boy’s father kept a saloon, and Reg Coleman told the Scotch boy that, and he came after me with his fists all fixed, and said, ‘What was a saloon, anyway?’ I didn’t say anything, right away, ’cause I was

thinking, but that silly little Perkins called out, 'It's a beer shop,' and the Scotch boy said to me, 'You're a liar!' and then we piled in. But when it was all done, we shook hands like gentlemen, and Cousin Airlie washed it all off, and I told the boy I liked him first rate, and so you needn't worry, you know." Whitney looked anxiously at his mother. "The Scotch boy's got a little brother here, too. Oh, not much younger than he is, and he's got to wear bare legs and kilts, and when I saw him first at the Galbraiths' I asked Jim what that heathen Scotch did with his legs out-doors. That was really another reason why Scotchie and I punched each other. But he's a very nice boy, mother, and we're going to go partners in that dog on Hess Avenue. He's a hideous beast, you know; he belongs to the milkman."

"Why, Whitney, he's a dreadful object," said Katharine.

"I know, mother. And that's why I want to own him, for I'm the only friend he has in the world. Nobody cares for that dog. But he knows I do."

"Whitney, child, if you have a dog, do have a decent one."

"No, mother, I want to have a dog that I can love, not one to admire."

Katharine had thought her battle fought and won; instead of that she began it all over again with diminished forces, for this time she consciously coveted defeat. She had been a fool; she had robbed the husband who loved her of the rights and rewards of repentance, and had wilfully doomed him to a life of sin, blindly exulting in her bitter renunciation.

She awoke the next morning transfigured. When she looked at Whitney, joy beamed in her eyes. She had separated the father from his child in what she had interpreted as an inspired devotion to a high ideal; she was to see them restored to each other, and the disfigured family life beautified once more. What had she to do with sin, except to save her beloved from it?

She went singing about the house, and Airlie, coming in early from the city, where she had spent the night, stood for a moment, listening in the hall, amazed.

"What is it, Kathie? Have you found a goldmine in the garden, or have you got indisputable proofs that Whitney is really the genius we know he is anyway? Tell me, dear."

Katharine looked at her with eyes that shone. "Oh, Airlie, I'm so happy," she said—"so happy!"

Airlie looked long at her. "Katharine, you're not going to— Oh, surely, Kathie, you aren't!" "What?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's impossible. Tell me. I shall imagine dreadful things."

"But this is not a dreadful thing. It's the only right thing," said Katharine, softly.

Airlie turned around sharply, but Katharine faced her in proud serenity.

"Oh, I know," said the girl, coldly. "You don't have to tell me anything."

"Oh, Airlie, try to understand me. I can't have you look at me like that, dear."

Airlie drew away from her. "Oh, Kathie, if it's that, we won't talk about it, please."

"But we will talk about it, Airlie; would I deny my child if he returned to me—if he returned from the depths of hell? Should I care even if he had heaped upon me every suffering that sorrow could know? Should I, his mother, keep account in my soul of my tears, and treasure against him in bitterness the pangs which were sharper than death? If I could, should I deserve the name of mother? No!"

"Ah, but marriage—" began Airlie.

"Ah, that is just it. Marriage is the supreme relationship. And shall I be less faithful, less forgiving to my husband than to my child?"

When I said 'until death,' there were no reservations behind that. It was not for as long as he *thought* he loved me. And if the law had been what it should be, it would have held my poor husband to me until that awful infatuation had run its course like the disease that it was."

"And now," said Airlie, unflinchingly, "you would have the law make it easy for him to leave her—for another woman."

"Airlie!" Katharine's eyes blazed, but the girl caught her hand and held her.

"I know, dear. It was cruel. But to get this thing right we must be honest, brutal."

They looked at each other with eyes full of tears, and then Katharine said, tremblingly: "His first duty is to me. He is the father of my boy. He loved me long ago, he loves me now, but for a little while he forgot, and because a poor conscienceless judge said to him, 'That's all right—here are your papers,' am I now, when he longs to return to me—am I to admit that our marriage was a mere contract to be set aside the moment one of us found it irksome, without even the consent of the other?"

"Yet when he is separated from her, you will not be his wife," said Airlie. "Don't forget that, Kathie. The very minister who married you would never admit that. You consider bind-

ing what your church admits can be annulled in a divorce court. That 'until death' is a delusion, dear, and the church knows it. A minister married you to him. A minister married him to her. A minister will marry you to him again if you wish. The church doesn't worry much about the sacredness of marriage."

Katharine's lip trembled, but she spoke bravely. "I can't help that. The church may sell itself for a mess of pottage, and the divorce laws may help to deceive people into believing themselves free, but in their hearts I am certain they are never deceived. What human power could declare null and void the relationship between a brother and sister? Then how can it separate husband and wife?"

"Ah, the cases are not the same," said Airie, quickly. "Kathie, I've thought a good deal about this. We are born brothers and sisters, just as we are born black or white. But we are not born husbands and wives. We assume that relationship, and just because it is assumed and becomes so close and so wonderful as I suppose you would contend that it does—that is the very reason why it must be possible for human beings to escape from such a bond if they want to. It need not ruin our lives to have a brother or a sister that we don't like, but it's bound to ruin

them if we've got a husband or a wife we don't like. And for that reason we must be able to get free. I wonder if I've got that right," she added, anxiously. "Dr.—Dr. Regester and I were talking about it yesterday. Oh, Kathie, the men are a plague any way you take them, that's all I do know. That horrid Balzac says the women brought disorder into the world. He doesn't mention that the Lord never let the men have it to themselves for five minutes. He was far too knowing to create two men to begin with. He knew they'd fight and kill each other before they were a day old, and bu'st up the whole scheme of creation at the very start—like the men do who are left alone at light-houses."

"Child, you think I'm doing wrong," said Katharine, sadly. "I don't. Not even the thought of another marriage disturbs me now, for Clifford must take again the vows which he broke."

Airlie sat silent for a long time. At last she said, in the smallest voice: "But, Kathie, how will he ever get a divorce from her? She will fight it. She loves him."

Katharine's fine face hardened. "I have nothing to do with that," she said, coldly.

But Airlie stood firm. "Oh, of course, it can be *managed*," she remarked, with an invidious

accent on the last word. "And you can think that you will be happy, Kathie?"

"Airlie, you do not understand. I love him still, and he loves me, and he is my husband."

"He loves you and you love him," repeated the girl, slowly. "That is what she said when she took him from you. And now she is his wife. She must be, if law counts for anything, and it must, even when it is wrong, if this world is to be a possible place to live in. Kathie, dear, wait and see if release will not come to you in some better way."

Katharine shook her head, and turned to her secretary. Her thoughts were leaping impatient toward the letter she was going to write Clifford. And Airlie watched her, noticing how young and pretty she looked again, but her heart filled with foreboding for Katharine. She saw nothing but evil, present and to come, in all this, and with her young, unspoiled ideals, it seemed to her incredible that a woman of Katharine's pride and nobility of thought could delude herself into believing that a new marriage built on the ruins of so much wrong and corruption could result in peace.

"Kathie, how *can* you forgive him?" she burst out, at last, impulsively. "It is wrong to forgive such things. Why, if he had been a thief, you

know you would never forgive him, though you might your boy. And yet you forgive this, the most fearful crime against a woman. I cannot understand it. Why, Kathie, you are such a proud woman. I should hate him. Oh, hate is nothing. There isn't a word to express what I mean."

"Run away, dear," said Katharine, gently. "I have said all I am going to. And I do not expect you to understand me. Airlie, darling, I do not even mind if you don't."

And Airlie kissed her, and then fled away to her room and stormed out her heart in a passion of tears.

But Katharine, with a wonderful glow on her face, sat writing her note. After all, she was glad that she had talked to Airlie, for she had been led to analyse her position in a way that revealed its strength to her as she had never appreciated it before. She grew more and more amazed at her folly of these past few months. This was what she wrote to her husband: "Clifford, I have been wrong. I need you, and Whitney needs you. God gave us all to each other, and He never meant us to be separated. Katharine."

That was all, but she knew well that it would be enough. Then she went out and posted her

letter, for her fingers ached to feel it gone. She swung along with her old light step, indifferent to wind or cold, remembering only that he was to be hers once more. She took no note of the haunting refrain beneath her joy, for no such passion as that which now burnt in her veins had ever had chance to smother her conscience before. The vision of Isabel, triumphant, his wife to the world, smiling into his eyes with a backward flash of derision for the smitten woman who had no legal right now to the father of her boy, was imprinted upon her heart in outline of fire. Ah, the world should see who was regnant at last!

What cared she that she had suffered?—her heart seemed now as if it must break beneath its weight of joy. What other woman knew the sublime heights and depths up and down which love had led her? But before her were stretched the placid fields of peace, green with softest verdure for her bruised feet, with a fair sky above in which the blue was broken by no storm-jagged cloud.

The long day wore on, but she could settle to nothing. She could only think of him, and picture the look on his face when he read her letter. Fleet-shifting visions of their reunited life filled her fancy; ah, he should never have to

seek her now. She had known the sharpness of death, but an Easter day of resurrection was nearing its dawn for her at last.

She started violently when the bell rang, and a girl's blush dyed her cheek. But no! he could not have had her letter yet.

"It's Miss Treworgey to see you, ma'am."

Katharine's face darkened. She was in no mood to see anyone to-day; least of all, perhaps; Miss Treworgey, the sister of an old watch-maker to whom she had for many years taken any odd repairing. She had become interested in them at first because of their peculiarities, and later, because of the fineness of character which she discovered beneath the surface.

The brother was a tall, spare, morose man, with a mouth which shut with a snap that should have been audible, but with an eye as heavenly blue as the sky on a midsummer day. Katharine had always been somewhat repelled by his grimness, but she found one day a key to his heart that never failed to fit afterward. She happened to take Whitney to the shop with her, and she stood amazed at the freemasonic relationship which one look appeared to reveal between the man and the boy. She was forgotten, while the two of them roamed from clock to clock, the old man explaining their mysteries with smiles which

contorted his hardened face like grips of rheumatism.

Yet after that, if Katharine went alone, she was received with the same reticence as before, but when she took Whitney, he worked a magic transformation.

By and by she made the acquaintance of the sister, a woman with features which had been given her for strictly practical purposes, but with a complexion like a September peach, against the pink of which her blue eyes were a delight to behold. In the dingy neighbourhood the little shop and its mistress left an impression of cleanliness upon the beholder like the perfume of grass-dried linen. In the rear there was a tiny garden, which in summer was an unbroken flower-bed, for plants grew in that sullen ground which no one else could raise. Katharine often came away from her visits to these two with her heart profoundly stirred.

"Did you ever listen, my dear, to the showers the Lord sends in springtime falling on the young leaves in the woods?"

This was Miss Treworgey's greeting to Katharine to-day.

"Miss Treworgey, you're a poet," said Katharine.

The gentle old woman looked grieved. "No,

dear, I'm just a child of God, an heir of salvation, saved by His grace."

The Treworgeys were Methodists, as befitted the descendants of sturdy Cornish stock.

"Pretty soon for me to come again, isn't it, my dear?" she continued, cheerfully. "It's just two months ago that I was here last, and I tell you I carried a heavy heart that day."

In spite of her preoccupation Katharine felt interested. "But, Miss Treworgey, how could that be? I remember thinking that you were positively gay that day."

"I had to be, my dear, for I sat here with hard work to keep the tears back. It seemed to me that day as if I must see you, and get some comfort just out of looking at you."

"But what was it? Can't you tell me now?" asked Katharine, sympathetically.

"Well, dear, I dare say you read about the failure of the Eagle Savings Bank. You see, we had six thousand dollars in that, and we had only heard of the failure the day before I came to see you."

"Why, Miss Treworgey!" exclaimed Katharine. She leaned forward, and took the old, work-roughened hand in hers. For in those simple words there was bitter tragedy.

"Oh, we have enough left, my dear, to keep

us when we're old." From Miss Treworkey's youthful point of view old age was yet remote in the distance. "Reuben has always worked so steady, that what he has earned, if it's only come in in little, has yet mounted up. And we live so careful, my dear. It won't take much for us."

"But Miss Treworkey, six thousand dollars!" repeated Katharine. She could not understand how this simple soul could talk of it so quietly in her sweet, even voice. "Why, I should have been distracted."

"My dear, I was." Miss Treworkey smiled placidly.

"How did your brother take it?" inquired Katharine.

"Wonderful, dear, wonderful. His face was as still, and he was as quiet and as gentle all that evening, and I looked at him and marvelled, and then I said: 'Praise the Lord,' in my heart, for Reuben loved his money. He lives poor and humble, but he could bear that easy, whenever he'd think of his bank account. Oh, we sat pretty quiet that evening. Once he said: 'It is the Lord's doing. Blessed be His name!'"

Katharine's eyes glowed mistily. "It's beautiful," she said, softly, stroking Miss Treworkey's hand.

"But, my dear, worse than losing the money came afterward. For Reuben began to talk about the changes we must make. We must cut down on this and pinch on that, which was all very right and true, but at last he said that after this he would only be able to give fifteen dollars a year to missions instead of thirty, as he always had done. And, my dear, that was just more than I could bear. But day after day he stood firm and resisted me. What hurt me so was that I'm not a contentious woman, and yet it must have seemed to Reuben as if I was acting like one. I said to him: 'Reuben, you can't hide the money you have left from the Lord. He'll find it, and break your heart by casting it abroad among the workers of iniquity, for that's all a miser's money is fit for in His sight. And He'll go right on and found His glorious kingdom here on this earth without the help of Reuben Treworgey, and yet you are His child.' You see, my dear, I felt it was a turning-point. Reuben had had a great loss, and if he turned his mind upon pinching, he'd get worse and worse as he got older. But the morning after that, as I was putting the fresh nosegay on the table, he came in and stepped up to me quite solemn, and kissed me, and said so quiet: 'Christina Jane, you shall have the money for the missions.' My dear, he

hadn't kissed me for years. He despises things like that."

"Wonderful!" said Katharine. "Think of it—that he should bear such plain talk from you. It's a beautiful character underneath. Of course he has loved money. I see that. And he has a fierce temper. And yet he bore reproof from you—the hardest one to take it from. It seems to me that he is learning all the lessons that life has to teach. Think of it—think of both of you!"

"Oh, my dear, it isn't life that teaches us," said Miss Treworgey, gently. "It's God in our poor hearts. We're all miserable creatures, without one plea, save His shed blood, and it's only His grace that saves us from destruction."

"Miss Treworgey, you're lovely," said Katharine, softly.

Ah, these two simple souls had indeed entered upon a heritage, not of earth, but eternal in the heavens. The pomp and circumstance of human pageantry was but vain gaud and worthless bauble to these children of a King; they owned a philosophy of life before which the proudest systems of thought must bend as broken reeds in the bitter moment when the soul cries out for redemption.

"Ah, but their ideas are all wrong!" exclaimed Katharine, passionately to herself, hours afterward. "They believe in absurdities, in impossibilities. That kind of thing is all very well for them—but for me—" She was silent a long time, then unconsciously she whispered aloud: "Yes, yes, but they have got at it—they have all, all that makes life worth living."

Just when did Katharine's future tremble for a supreme moment in the great balance? She never knew; she only remembered afterward that she seemed to awaken at last to an intense horror of herself. How had she been so dull as to misunderstand the fierceness of the struggle which had gone on in her all these months? Against the turmoil and the passion of her inner life she set now with terrible effect the purity, the peace, the lofty unselfishness of the old watchmaker and his sister, and so saw herself battling against all that was noblest in her nature, defying the pain which cried aloud to her of wounded, shamed ideals.

She had wanted to save him for herself, careless of what soul might perish in the wreck.

Had it been wrong, then, to be true to him, to exalt her marriage vows supreme against all human interference? No, no! But there was granted to her now the larger vision, and she

saw her brief, self-centred life in a wider reaching relation to other lives than she had before conceived of—to lives which in some dim future might be saved or lost according as she saved or sinned now.

Yes, if she loved her husband, she had a duty toward the woman with whom he had fallen from which she could never escape. She had said once that Isabel could never be left out, and she had thought that she meant it then. But she had said it to him, with the light of his eyes upon her own, and her heart aflame with the exaltation of his beloved nearness.

But now, she said it again, alone, in that bitter loneliness which was never to have ending.

When Airlie came home late that night, she found Katharine waiting for her on the dim landing at the head of the stairs.

"Kathie dear, what is it? You look like a ghost, but such a sweet one." She laughed lightly, but her heart was full of rebellion against Katharine. Something tender in her girlish purity was bruised; she could not rid herself of the thought that in linking her life again with her husband's Katharine would become not so much unlike Isabel.

"Oh, I'm coming not to believe in marriage as an institution at all," she had said, defiantly,

the day before to Regester. "Katharine puts so much emphasis on her vows, but I can't discover that they were registered irrevocably anywhere; because we know that they're only binding here until they're not, and as for heaven, well, you see they're wise enough not to have any marriage system there. I'm more and more sure that your plan is the right one, and that the thing to do is to issue marriage licenses good for one year, and just renew them if you want to, like fire insurance and that kind of thing."

"Really, the way in which you assimilate the wisdom presented to you is encouraging," said Regester. "I'll never despair of a subject again."

The girl laughed lightly enough, but she parted from Regester only to begin again with herself the endless argument concerning Katharine. She would not give up yet. She had discovered flaws in her idol, but it could not be, surely, that Katharine quite understood the gravity of what she was bent upon doing.

"Airlie, I want to say something to you," said Katharine now, as she drew the girl into her room.

"Well, what is it? Tell me quick. I can't bear it when you're so quiet, Katharine. You frighten me."

"It's so little to tell you, dear. Only that you were right this morning, and I was wrong."

"Kathie, you mean——"

"Oh, child, it must seem strange to you that I change so. Airlie, I have never changed really. In my heart I have known always what was right and what was wrong. But, dear, I have suffered so." Her still voice quivered. "I did not want to suffer any more. I just wanted to be happy—happy with him. Airlie, I have had so little happiness. Why had it to be so? Oh, my dear, I should not talk to you like this. But I—I have—no one else."

Airlie burst into tears. "Kathie, Kathie, I've been cruel to you. I didn't mean to be. I couldn't help it. And now you break my heart. What do you mean, dear? Do you mean you're not—not—going to——"

Katharine nodded. She could not speak.

"Oh, Kathie, I want you to be happy. And he loves you. How can he stay with her? How can you leave him with her? Dear, what makes you so still? Kathie, don't you care? Don't you think of him?"

Katharine laid her fingers over the stabbing lips.

And Airlie, looking at her, saw the bitterness of death in her face.

CHAPTER XVIII

MACKEMER had been in New York for several days; upon his return he found, as usual, an accumulation of private mail on his desk. He ran over the letters rapidly until he came upon one in Katharine's writing, and then a second. In quick alarm he compared the postmarks, and discovered that one was six hours later than the other; he tore that open first. It was very brief:

"Dear Clifford: I am afraid that I have done you a great wrong. Since this morning everything has become clear to me. I must seem so variable. Clifford, I shall not change again. You will know already what I mean. This morning I felt that I could forget Isabel—that I *would* forget her. I thought that we, you and I together again, could blot that all out. We never could. Isabel belongs to us—to you and to me—because I love you. To-night for the first time in my whole life I have realised that I am immortal—that you are—that she is. That makes it all different. For the first time, I be-

lieve in immortality, and if I have still to suffer, it does not seem to me to matter. My heart is at rest, and I love you, but I will never take from Isabel the only good she knows."

Mackemer laid the letter down with a groan. He understood now what had happened, and by and by he read the other letter. And then there came to him a terrible perception of the price that was being paid for his and Isabel's redemption.

The business of the day crowded itself in upon him. One client succeeded another, successful and unsuccessful, harassed and harassing, women with wills to make and others with money to lose, and some with fingers which betrayed the gambler's instinct, eager to find a respectable field for its exercise in the buying and selling of stocks. He listened to them all with a new, most curious feeling of sympathy, but he was conscious of a sense of detachment from them such as the inhabitant of another world might feel. He saw so many things this morning that he had never noticed before. How eager his clients were, almost without exception, to do all the talking themselves! Did they always act like that? Yes, he thought that they did. In the end, as he knew, they relied upon him, but on the way they seemed principally anxious to impress upon

him with what extreme ability they could handle their own affairs had they not chosen to turn them over to him.

"Red Blade's going down," said a fashionable woman, excitedly. "I thought I'd better come in and see you about it."

"My dear lady, did you suppose that your buying Red Blade would prevent its ever doing that?" he asked, gently. "You remember that I advised you not to buy; not because the best stock in the world is not liable to tumble sometimes, unfortunately, but because I don't believe in Red Blade."

She interpreted his manner as adorably autocratic.

"But Mr. Dunbar"—she smiled consciously—"insisted that it was such a good investment for me."

"Yes, when he unloaded on you," thought Mackemer.

Immortality! The word flashed out at him from Katharine's letter, and the poor woman before him in her weight of worthless riches stood revealed to him in all her ghastly poverty.

"Why do you want more money?" he asked, quietly. "Think of all the good you might do with what you have."

She laughed shrilly. "What? This in a law-

yer's office? Oh, you're deep. You'll make me afraid of you. I'm not shrewd enough to keep up with you if you begin to talk like that."

She went away laughing, with a confused belief that he was a much smarter man even than she had supposed him to be.

Through the long day Mackemer saw Katharine's face continually before him—her face as he had looked upon it that night when Whitney lay so near death—with its tender, beseeching eyes.

He thought again of her early girlhood, when he had first come to know her, sweet in the innocence which had bewitched him while he wooed and won her. And then of her young wifedom, when he had exultantly unsealed to her a hundred hidden treasures in their love, only to grow weary at last with the consciousness that she stooped to him from a higher plane—that the lily was too unalterably fair.

Ah! between them there had always been a great gulf fixed, how great it was never for her to know.

To be forgiven by her—perhaps—ah, yes! But to be restored?— The new spiritual discernment, so marvellously at growth within him of late, revealed to him now what a severe moral shock that would ultimately have ensured to

them both. Her love had become the great necessity of his life; but though she had more to give him now than her young past had dreamed of—No, no! while with the one hand he might have pulled her from her throne, the other, sure and strong, held her up. He read her letters again, and a cruel dimness veiled his eyes. *Isabel, Isabel!* He could have borne his punishment alone, but to bear it with her! How could he live out his life with her, day after day, moment by moment, punishment inexhaustible! With the unconscious refining of his whole nature which had begun slowly, to proceed at last so rapidly, there was opportunity for the utmost torture in the life which he had so wantonly assumed. And he did not realise that the increasing asceticism of his mind set its stamp upon his outward seeming in a way that piqued Isabel to her utmost endeavour. It excited her—this husband whose repeated conquest required more art than any lover's. She tried to remodel her mind and her clothes to fit the case, and came to fifty shrewd conclusions a day concerning men as they concerned women. Had Mackemer been less imperatively attractive to a woman than he was, he would have fared differently at the hands of Isabel just now.

"Do you know what I would do if I ever

found out that you didn't love me any more?" she asked him, suddenly, one night.

He looked at her.

"I would go out on the street and offer myself to the first man who came by." She shook with the fierceness of her emotion. And then she was ashamed—ashamed that it had been possible to her to say such a thing to him.

"But I'm never going to let that happen," said Mackemer, gravely. He laid his hand in passing on her shoulder; she quivered helplessly under his touch.

These were troublous days for Airlie; she found herself a problem not easily solved. For now that all chance of a reunion between Katharine and her husband was withdrawn, she became its staunchest advocate.

"Why aren't you doing something worth while for my poor Kathie?" she said, petulantly, to Regester. "I came home the other day and found her lying unconscious in her room. When I got her revived and scolded, she said it was nothing—that it had happened before. But you know that it is something, and that it's your business to do something."

He looked at her in silence a moment. Then he said, somewhat coldly, "I am doing all that I can."

"What do you mean?" she asked, sharply.
"Do you know more about Kathie than I do?"

He hesitated; then he said, slowly: "Perhaps I had better tell you—I think you ought to know—she let me bring Dr. Brigham out to see her last week."

"Dr. Brigham! Then you thought Kathie—ill?"

"I did."

"Is she any better?"

"Not yet."

"Will she ever be?" The sweet blue eyes were unflinching.

He hesitated.

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed Airie, passionately; "don't dare to say anything to me. For it's all my fault. I've spoiled everything for her. She would have forgiven her husband and taken him back, and been so happy again, and now—now she is breaking her heart, and she will—" She could say no more.

"Have I said that?" asked Regester. "You must forbid that thought. It will do her great harm in you. And you had nothing whatever to do with her action in regard to Mr. Mackemer, I imagine. She has done her own thinking about that, and she has done it well. Do you know, child"—his stern voice softened into sudden ten-

derness—"death is such a little matter compared with the disaster that she might have brought upon them both for the sake of a brief delusion in what we call happiness."

"And you dare to say to me that it doesn't matter if Kathie dies?" demanded Airlie.

"I do," he answered, coldly. "There are, as it happens, some things worth dying for, though to you it may sound preachy to say so. She can't lose her life more finely than just for them. And she knows that. She has learned a great deal in her little while. When I look at her and see how nobly she has conquered the most intolerable type of suffering, I wonder what the rest of us are all living for."

"But Whit—there is Whit," exclaimed Airlie, in a choked voice.

"Whitney? What can harm Whitney now? The child is as safe as he ever was, long ago in his mother's arms. She has stamped her character ineffaceably upon him. Why do we fear evil so much that we forget to recognise the marvellous perseverance of good? She has entered so completely, so dominantly into her child's thinking that her visible presence is far less important to him than we may imagine. Why, there isn't any death for her. The future is charged with her personality. Talk about he-

redity! Long after you and I are dust, the beauty of character toward which she fought will be finding nobler expression than we dream of. Through tears and struggle such as few of us are lofty enough to attain, she has ensured it perpetuation. That is the only life everlasting, it appears to me, but it's enough, it's enough. Long ago, a pale Galilean achieved it in supreme degree in the same simple, awful way—just self-sacrifice, renunciation, death, if you like to call it so—and there isn't anything better that we've evolved yet as a scheme of immortality."

"I dare say," said Airlie, drearily. She went over to the piano and began gathering up her music, but she could not see it for the tears that filled her eyes.

"Oh, it's nothing to you, of course," she burst out, at last. "You're used to this. And you're so cold. You can philosophise beautifully, because you never loved anything in your life—not *loved*. I know you haven't. And if you thought you did, you'd mount the emotion as a specimen and put it under the microscope, and just have the time of your life finding out what fool constituents it was made up of. Oh, you think you're so superior—I tell you it's a *disgrace* to be like that." She was beside herself with grief; the man nobly understood it so.

"A disgrace?" He looked at her steadily, and beneath his intense gray eyes Airlie trembled. "You say that the gift to love is not mine? Do you know it quite galls me to have you think that, because it isn't true."

Airlie said nothing; she was seized by the most inexplicable shyness.

"I think I would like to tell you a story," continued Regester. "There was once a fool—a man, of course—who only found out after a long time that he loved—loved—a little girl, a saucy little girl, who laughed at fools and men, and loved only something she called Art." There was no laughter in Regester's voice—it was very grave. "The fool was afraid of the little girl, so he didn't say anything; he just watched her getting older and older until she was a tiny old maid——"

"An old maid?"—but there were tears again in the girl's eyes.

"A tiny old maid with short gray curls and glasses, but still rather gay as to clothes. And by that time her voice was all gone, and with it that detestable thing in her life called Art that she was always ranting about."

"Ranting?"

"And by this time the fool was a bachelor of fifty or so, very good-looking and well-preserved,

having been so delightfully free from domestic care and worry. Well off, too, not having had any extravagant little girl to provide for all these years, but very charitable and distinguished in his profession, having had no distracting wife to interfere with his devotion to scientific research."

"Indeed, you won't be anything of the kind," broke in Airlie, vehemently. "You'll be—all sorts of horrid things by the time you're fifty, and married to a big fat woman, and as meek and hen-pecked as can be, in spite of your fine chin."

"Oh, no, no! You're quite mistaken, Miss Casler. The faithful fool won't ever have married the big fat woman. He will always have kept fresh in his heart the memory of the little girl he loved once, and he'll even be devoted to the cross old maid, who can't sing any better than an owl. He'll watch her sitting in her window with her cat, and a stout pug, and a parrot."

"But I won't be an old maid," protested Airlie. Her voice shook; her heart withered with fear lest she should cry. Cry? What did she want to cry for? She hated the man.

"Oh, you'll marry, will you? A tenor, I suppose, with the uncertain morals of his sort."

"Yes," she answered, recklessly; "I don't care if I do."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Regester. He stood a moment in silence looking down at her, tall and masterful. "Of course, it would never do for you to marry me. I know that. I think the tenor would really suit you better. Do you know why?" She was mute. "Because I should ask more of you than you could give, perhaps."

Her eyebrows just lifted above the downcast lids.

"You see, I believe in a home," he said; "a home of so fine a type that into it there must enter a woman's noblest endeavour. Nothing else would satisfy me. I do not offer the woman I love an easy life. I offer her a future of difficulty, one that would tax every gift and resource that she possesses. I don't ask her to share my life and some outside interest. I ask her to accept my life as all there is for her—to exalt its annoyances, its stupidities, its anxieties, to the supreme place in her thought. She may have great executive ability—be fitted to move mountains out-of-doors, for the good of the public and her own glorification—what do I care about that? My wife will have to use her executive ability in my home, but she—at least, that little girl—could make of it as radiant and as sacred a spot as this earth has ever seen. And in return for all that such a little wife would bring into my

life, what have I to offer?" His tone changed—the strife, the anxiety of the lover invaded his voice. "Nothing, it seems to me sometimes—nothing. Yes, everything—everything—that a little woman like that should care for most." He bent toward Airlie, but she stepped back, her eyes full of fear, vague, indefinite fear of a future fraught with the mystery of pain—of love. She had grown white.

"Ah, my voice!" she said, in a tense whisper; "my lovely, lovely voice!" She clasped her slender throat protectingly with her dainty fingers.

"Then you love it better than you could me?" asked Regester, slowly.

"Why do you ask me such a thing?" she flamed.

"Because I told you that I wanted no half allegiance. I want all from the woman I love or nothing. I have seen enough of the miseries of men who have married musical women. Do you know what the Lord make musicians out of? All the left-over fools in the Universe, that He can't do anything else with. And considering the stuff, I must admit that sometimes He does great things with it. But He made a mistake, little girl, when He got you in among them. You were meant for finer things."

"Finer?" gasped Airlie.

"Yes, finer," he repeated, stubbornly. "You say you have a lovely voice——"

"Well, of all the impertinence——"

"Then you can find a nobler way of using it, child, and one far more honouring to the Art you profess to serve, than by grimacing upon a public platform——"

"Grimacing!"

"Night after night in a desperate effort to please a fickle audience which is always looking for a fresh sensation, and which will some day throw you away like a faded flower for some new bud."

"So they may," said Airlie, defiant. "By that time I shall be a rich woman, and what shall I care?"

"Rich!" he echoed, scornfully. But presently his eyes softened. "Child, live my life with me, a life of hardship, of toil, of self-denial, but of peace that nothing can take away. Listen! I wish I could feel that your voice should never be prostituted to the earning of money again, but that it should be dedicated to the noblest uses, to the soothing of pain—come with me some day to the hospital—that it was an inspiration, a call higher to every soul that heard it. Airlie, oh, Airlie, should I talk to you then as I do now,

when I see so great a gift hawked about from one platform to another, from one church to another, debased to the level of merchandise? Why do you dare to want to make money? Haven't you enough? Is not all that you need provided for you? Have you never thought of some poor girl, perhaps, whom you keep out of a position by filling the one she should have? Have you never thought that it may be demanded of you that you shall not earn, because some other must?" He waited a moment, but Airlie said nothing, and he went hotly on again: "You remember Reynolds? He said to me the other day, 'I wonder if that little girl wouldn't come down here some Sunday and sing to my people?' You know I've told you what an enthusiast Reynolds is, and he got quite worked up thinking of your singing. 'I've got a girl down here who's bothering me, Regester,' he said, 'and I can't seem to do anything for her, but I believe that little curly haired girl could, if she would only sing to her. I believe she could save poor Marie. 'Tisn't only the little girl's voice, you know, Regester—it's her sympathy, her sweetness. I think she could get a grip on Marie.' But I said to him: 'Oh, no, old boy, she couldn't sing for you. She's busy making money on Sundays, tickling the ears of the rich and righteous.

She hasn't any time to bother about girls like Marie. You'll just have to let her go to the devil.' "

"You said that!" exclaimed Airlie. "Then just see if I don't go down there next Sunday! I'd do anything for Dr. Reynolds. He's a nice, nice man." She swept Regester with an offensive eye. "There, I've got to catch the five train"—she looked anxiously at the horological bauble that hung in a smother of lace on her gown. "Oh, it isn't going—I forgot to wind it. No, it's broken. Oh, dear! Dr. Regester, what is the time?"

"Oh, you have time enough," he answered, with a provoking smile.

"No, I haven't. I've got to change my dress, and see Kathie, and decide what music I'll sing. I wish you'd go now. But I want to say a whole lot of things to you. You've been outrageous this afternoon. You think a woman was just made for a man to swallow. You'd bound her ambitions by a husband and the kitchen—well, I can tell you——"

"Airlie!"

"Go away," she whispered. "No, I don't. I never will. I'd scorn to."

But when she reached Katharine's room she burst into a little storm of tears.

"Oh, Kathie," she wailed, "that young man says he loves me! Me, dear, me! Isn't it hideous? Marry him, darling, marry him? Why, he's a tyrant, a monster. He's got the craziest notions. He actually says that if he married he'd expect a home. Think of it!" The girl's laughter overcame her. "As if any man has a right to expect such a thing nowadays of anything but just the merest woman. Oh! he's simply an overbearing—horror."

"Airlie! You didn't tell him that?"

"No, my precious. But I should have. I shall have to. Someone must enlighten him as to his being whole centuries behind his times, and who so fitting as I under the circumstances? Oh, kiss me, Kathie! How could there be anything dearer to a woman than another woman she loves? What's a man in comparison?"

"Airlie, what *did* you say to him?"

"What did I say to him? My dear, I wasn't called upon to say anything. Poor boy! He has the most mistaken ideas as to the place of man in nature. He doesn't in the least realise that his sort is as extinct as megatheriums and things. No, he neglected to tell me what he would expect for breakfast every day, or whether he would require his wife to iron his shirts in order that they might have a strictly domestic

finish, but he couldn't say everything at once, could he?"

Katharine came to the conclusion before long that to be in love with Airlie was in itself a liberal education for any man. But as time passed a new reserve settled upon the girl; yet she displayed her genius for coquetry as never before, meekly seeking Regester's opinion one moment, only to flout it the next; pensive, relenting, one day, only to be hopelessly defiant another. But in truth Regester perplexed and irritated her. Was the indifference he had so unvaryingly manifested since that eventful afternoon actually as real as it appeared to be? He had never referred to the great question again; when they were alone he positively nauseated her by endless dissertations on flying machines and such! Naturally, she never wished him to utter the word love to her again, but a man who had been—well, refused—might at least have the grace to show that he knew he had been.

"Marry that man, Kathie! Well, not a little. As an object of matrimony he is abhorrent to me. Besides, Vecellio said, 'My child, nevaire, nevaire marree. Marree is fool business when you can seeng. There is no man worth spoil your lofely t'roat for. When you not can seeng, then marree, little one, and be so miserable

a woman fool enough to be. It not mattaire then.' No, Kathie, don't say another thing to me about that young man. It bores me." She began to sing in a charming voice:

" I'm the last girl of the summer,
Left fading alone;
All my lovely companions
Are married and gone.

"Ah, I like that!" she exclaimed. "I must really try it on him some time." But she never had opportunity to do so, for the next time he found her alone he said, without preliminary: "I asked you a question the other day. You had no time to answer it then. You have now."

"What question?" She looked at him with daring eyes.

"I told you that I loved you. I asked you to be my wife. Airle, will you?"

"Oh, don't!" she said, flippantly. "Let us talk of something else."

He was silent a moment. Then he said, quietly, "In future we will, Miss Casler."

In the days that followed she encountered the young man continually on his way in and out of the house, but she did not feel able to ask him about the change in Katharine's condition, which she feared accounted for the frequency of

his visits. In her despair her thoughts turned to Mackemer; surely someone ought to let him know of the state of affairs. But just as she came to the determination to do so, it seemed as if Katharine, quietly watching her from half-closed eyes, read her thought. "Airlie, I want to talk to you," she said. "I have been so afraid that some of you might think I wanted to see my husband. No, dear. I have perfect peace—about him. It has come since I ceased to struggle. I wanted him to need me, and I think he does, but not as I meant. Oh, Airlie, there come such wonderful thoughts to me as I lie here. I do not understand my life—I do not know why I have had to suffer as I have, but I do not need to know. I like to think that perhaps I have saved someone else from such a Gethsemane as I have known. Happiness, real happiness—not the cheap stuff that we all so passionately crave until we learn better—always costs an enormous price, I think, and we never want to pay it. Darling, if sorrow ever comes to you as it has come to me, don't be afraid of it as I have been. But it will never come to you as it did to me, for, Airlie—oh, you won't be angry with me, will you?"—the girl nearly smothered her—"child, I have been so afraid lately that perhaps he loved you too well, better than you

deserve. Some day you will know that there is no greater treasure than such a man's love. Airlie, you mustn't trifle with him any more."

Airlie laid her cheek shyly against Katharine's. "Oh, Kathie, I do love him, a—little. But it would kill me to have him know it."

Katharine smiled tenderly. "Dear, tell him," she said. She drew the girl's face down between her hands, and looked mistily into the sweet eyes. "Oh, Airlie, there lies just before you the most lovely experience of your life. Child, you will never know—ah, the beauty of it! until it is long past."

"Whitney, weren't you to run over to Dr. Regester's for something for your mother?" asked Airlie that evening. "Well, I'll go, darling. It's snowing awfully, and you've got your shoes off, and there are all your lessons to be done, and——"

Whitney felt suddenly quite peculiarly important. It had never seemed so necessary for him not to go on an errand before; it implied the dawn of manlier days, and he began to spell P-o-m-p-e-i-i with an energy suited to the value of his precious moments.

After her talk with Katharine, Airlie had gone to her room, dried her tears, flourished away vain sentimental communings with her soul, and

set herself to a logical review of the situation. First, the young man loved her. She reiterated this several times with much vigour. Second, she—loved—him—yes. Third, Katharine said she ought to tell him so. Fourth, then tell him! Fifth, but how? Sixth, a letter? Idiot! And miss all the first bliss of it? Never!

"I have come for Katharine's medicine," she said, demurely, when Regester came in and found her waiting in his office. If he felt surprise at seeing her there, no sign of it escaped his cold politeness. He handed it to her at once, but she made no movement of departure.

"This is the first time that I've ever been here. Did you know that?" she asked, with an unconsciously sweet upward glance at him.

Did he know it?

Wrapped in a huge, red, fur-lined cloak, with a red Tam crushed down on her pretty hair, she made a charming picture, but Regester hardened his heart. Sometimes in his bitterness he told himself that she was a trivial little thing, but he knew better all the time, and because he did, he meant some day to marry her. But he had no hope of winning her easily or soon, and yet he wanted her so desperately, now, now.

Gay, appealing, winsome little Airlie! How

it stirred him to see her, there in his office, for the moment a part of it.

"It's a smelly, bottly place, isn't it?" she said, smiling bravely. "I think you could make it look much prettier. I know just the kind of curtains those windows ought to have."

He was silent.

Her eyes travelled the room reflectively. Then: "Don't you think a—a—doctor's—wife—oh, don't look so fierce. Now you've frightened me so. No, I never can— Oh, I think it's so mean of you—why—why don't you say something, when I ran all through this awful snow just to tell you—to tell you"—her soft voice quivered—"that—that I do love you, and I'll try to be good and domestic and let my hair grow long, and do it up nice and old, and take an interest in soups and sinks, and darn socks, and—and——"

"Airlie!" he exclaimed. "Airlie!"

The starved heart of his boyhood, of his strong young manhood, entered at last royally into its right.

"Oh! Do you care so much—so much?" whispered Airlie. "Oh! Then let me say it again." She looked up at him with wet eyes. "Dear, I love you. I love you."

He held her hands without a word, his soul drinking hers into his. It was the great moment; he knew it, and lived it full, with a passionate grudge in his heart against the robber, Time.

CHAPTER XIX

THE house at Glenedge was very still that morning—Whitney away at school, and Airlie on a hurried trip down town. Only an occasional sound from the servants below stairs reached the quiet of Katharine's room. She was glad to be alone for a little while; her deep nature craved solitude, and sometimes it wearied her that they never left her alone any more.

"Oh, I don't think I'm ill," she had said to the great specialist whom Regester brought to see her. "I think I'm only lazy—except sometimes when I have that curious pain in my heart. I suppose it's my heart?" she added, questioningly.

The great man patted her head. "You don't want anything?"

"Oh, no!" she answered him, with an intense look. "I have wanted so many things in my life, but I don't want anything any more. I'm just happy, happy," she repeated, "and lazy."

"Happy!" he exclaimed, as he went away

with Regester. "Yes, she's happy, but it's the sort of happiness that doesn't belong down here. No, no, my boy, we can't do anything for her. A broken heart is all that's the matter with her, but she doesn't know it, poor child! She's just 'happy and lazy,' " he repeated, with Katharine's intonation. "But if she were happy, if she could be made so, she'd soon be well. But she can't be made happy. Still, I would experiment. A plague on your morals! I should try letting her see her husband."

The still morning slipped by; Katharine fell into a doze from which she was awakened by a step in the room. "What is it, Mina?" she asked, quickly. "Whitney?" She had been dreaming about him.

"No, ma'am. A lady to see you. She say she must see you." The girl held a card toward Katherine. "What can I do, ma'am? I say, you ill, and she smile and say, yes, yes, she suppose, but she will stay for you see her."

Mina blundered heavily through the speech, with an uneasy suspicion that she had somehow lacked diplomacy in dealing with the imperious lady down-stairs, and that she was laying herself open to the wrath of Dr. Regester. Oh! why was Miss Airlie not at home—Miss Airlie who always knew just what to do?

The card fell from Katharine's thin hand, and for a moment of great fear she closed her eyes, almost losing consciousness. The colour surged into her face, and then faded, leaving it whiter than before.

"The lady," began Mina again, but Katharine held up her hand, and the girl hushed, and stared at the wall with the stolid calm of the domestic Swede.

But it seemed a long time to Mina before Katherine at last said: "You may bring her up. And tell her that I shall be glad to see her."

Ah! how many times of late she had longed to see Isabel, and now her opportunity had come, presented to her, unsought, unforced, an ungrudged gift from the lap of Fate. Death had touched her with his finger; they thought that she did not know that—and set as she was, daily further from the strife, a strange tenderness for Isabel possessed her, an insistent longing to help, to influence, as perhaps only she could. Oh! that terrible pain again! It seemed as if she must suffocate, but in a moment, with shaking hand she reached for the little glass on the table beside her. What if she failed now of the strength to express what ached in her heart for utterance!

"Perhaps she has heard that I am ill. Perhaps she wants to say that she is sorry."

The sweetest expression came into her face, and in a quiver of tender expectancy she lay quite still.

There was the noisy approach of rustling silken skirts; the door was pushed open, and Isabel stood beside her—Isabel, splendid, defiant, avenging, anger and anxiety paling her radiance, but lending to the glitter of her narrow eyes.

She had come to battle, yet for the moment she hesitated, startled. But only for the moment. Then the memory of her friend's voice that morning, eager, insinuating, vicious as the hiss of a snake, darted back upon her, and like a greedy flame licked up the stream of pity which had gushed for an instant in her heart.

"Oh, of course, all I really know, dear, is that Mr. Mackemer certainly goes out to Glenedge regularly to see her. Why, Mrs. Manning's nephew meets him on the train continually. Of course, it can't help but make people talk, can it, dear? That's the tiresome thing about it. Men are the strangest creatures, aren't they?"

"Oh, pshaw!" said Isabel, yawning lazily. "He goes out there to see his boy—I wished him to." (But had he—had he? Was that all? The

storm in her bosom nearly stifled her.) "And of course, as you say, there are always fools to talk, and they may, for all that I care."

"You're awfully sweet about it, dear, aren't you?"

"Sweet about it? Why shouldn't I be?" laughed Isabel. "My husband can't see his boy too often to suit me. I want that boy. I mean to have him some day. He's just the dearest thing you ever saw in your life."

But when the door at last closed upon her visitor, she stood still for a moment, silent, not a breath seeming to stir her frozen heart. Then, with hands closed convulsively, she began to walk up and down the room with the steady step of a caged thing, while she recalled with incriminating clearness that visit to Milwaukee from which she had always dated the greatest change in her husband. This, then, was the explanation of it all, of that strange growth in reserve, in asceticism which had so baffled and fascinated her! A moment later, as in electric flash, she realised how vast, how humiliating had been her density as to the nature of the gulf which these later months had sprung between them, for day after day, in her innocence, she had sought to bridge it with strenuous charm, with subtly invented allurements.

She laughed in scorn of herself. To be the dupe of that white-faced hypocrite, that woman who had dared defy her in her own home, who had threatened—ah, what had she said?

Someone was moaning. Why, it was she, Isabel. Moaning? "You have not taken my husband from me. You never can. He is mine, and you know it. He is not yours."

Not hers? Wait! She drew herself up superbly, all traces of weakness, of suffering, crushed from her face by a supreme effort of will. She was not a nerveless fool, limp clay in the grip of some grim, sardonic Potter, who fashioned this shape to-day but to grind it into formless dust to-morrow. No! She was clay, yes! but vibrant with the Potter's own breath, and with it she would defy him.

"Oh, God!"

The Potter's name fell agonisedly from her lips, in frenzied appeal, reproach, rebellion.

"He is not yours. He is mine, and you know it." There it was again.

A curious change passed over her face. "I will see," she said, softly, and in a few minutes she was ready for the street.

She laughed scornfully at the maid's excuse that her mistress was ill, but the sight of Katharine was a shock to her.

But only for the moment. Then she remembered, and when she spoke it was in a voice vibrating with an anger which was yet able to pick its expression.

"I want to talk to you. May I? Once you came to talk to me. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember," said Katharine, in a faint voice.

"You looked upon me then as a dreadful woman, didn't you? I had stolen your husband from you, hadn't I? You thought that there was an immense difference between you and me, didn't you? Perhaps you flatter yourself that there isn't so very much difference now. But there is. Just all the difference. For when I tried to take your husband from you I succeeded. You have tried to take my husband from me, but you have failed. He is still mine, and he always will be."

Katharine lay quite still, her dark wistful eyes fixed on Isabel's face. They were deep with pain.

"And you actually believed that because Clifford longed to see his boy, he cared for you." Isabel laughed softly. "My dear, I love Whitney myself, and I should think very little of Clifford if he wasn't tremendously attached to him, especially since we lost our own baby."

"Your baby?" repeated Katharine, with tremulous lips. She was stabbed with a sudden cruel consciousness of the aloofness of her husband's life from her own; how much there was in it that she could never know. She had imaged continually an exquisite, indivisible communion of soul between them, and now this baby, visible pledge of that other terrible love, crept separatingly between them.

"Oh, Clifford idolised her," said Isabel. "It was a fearful blow to him when she died. If she had lived—but she didn't, you see, and you have the advantage of me now in having Whitney." She laughed again. "But don't count on it. You were a fool once when you let another woman take your husband from you. Don't be a fool again. Do you think that you could take Clifford from me—you?"

She threw herself into a magnificent pose.

The contrast between them could not have been more complete, and she exulted in it to the uttermost. In her the rich red life of the flesh flowed warm—in the other, the pale stream of existence crept meagrely toward the dark river of Death. Yet as the throbbing moments passed her triumphant insolence suffered a check, inexplicable to her—maddening.

What was it in that still, white face, in those

steadfast eyes, in the patient, tremulous mouth that defied her, that knew no fear of her, that radiated a peace as serene as if Clifford's love lay safe in the sheltering hollow of the poor thin hand?

It was not to be borne, and suddenly Isabel leaned far over the bed. "You poor thing! You thought you would lay traps for my husband. You thought you could take him away from me—you!"

For a long moment her face bent close to Katharine's—her eyes a mere gleam of narrow flame, her lips a line of bitten scarlet; then with a smothered exclamation she threw herself back and sank into a chair, the struggling breath freeing itself from her knotted throat almost in sob.

And the room grew very still again, for Katharine lay with closed eyes, unstirred as death. And Isabel watched her, sullen with the gathering consciousness of defeat. The woman was ill—there was no doubt of that; suffering—and not as Isabel longed to see her suffer. Ah! could she have chosen now, she would have set Katharine upon her feet before her, vivid with all the bloom of her vanished youth and health, and it should have been a duel to the death between them, flesh against flesh, passion against passion.

But now?—was she dying? Did she know—did he?

Her face flushed deep. Dying? She sucked the word greedily within covetous lips. Her soul cried out, "Away with her, away with her!" even at the cost to her of that revenge she counted so dear. Revenge?—she need crave none now. She laid her desire for it at the cold feet of death—satisfied.

Ah! he would yet be hers, alone, unchallenged, when this poor thing was mouldered dust in a forgotten grave.

She leaned forward and looked at Katharine with a strangely sweet smile. "Have you suffered?" she asked, in her soft, velvety voice. "I am so sorry."

Katharine looked at her. Then she stretched out her wasted but still beautiful hand, and touched Isabel's, a hand so different that it might have belonged to a woman from another world.

"You will be good to me? You will let me talk to you?" The appealing, attenuate quality of the voice disturbed Isabel—she shivered and shrank back.

"Oh, no! I want you near to me. See, like that. You will be patient? I have so little time—that terrible pain will come again, but I must talk to you. You think that I am bitter—that I hate

you. No, no! That is all gone. I want nothing—for myself, any more. But you and Clifford”—Katharine’s eyes filled with cruel tears—“why, oh, why had we both to love him? See my wedding-ring—and yours—both from him. Isabel, Isabel”—she laid her hand pleadingly on Isabel’s again—“how could it be right? No, no! Don’t go yet. I want to tell you—I want you to be happy. But there is only one way. And you have got to find it. You cannot escape that—sometime—somewhere. I have, but it took a long time. And I’m—dying.”

“No, no,” said Isabel, hurriedly. “You’re ill, of course. But you will get better. Oh, yes, yes.”

“Child, I can’t,” said Katharine, in a difficult whisper. “And I mustn’t. The world has not place for us both. In a little while”—her voice quivered piteously—“I shall be away, and you will be here alone with Clifford. You’ll never need to be afraid any more of his coming out to see me—you’ll never be afraid any more of his growing good. But, Isabel, you’ll want him to be good. Ah, how I have loved him! Love—it is all that matters—if it has been enough—when you’re—lying here like me.”

An alarming change passed over her face, followed by a spasm of pain, terrible to witness,

during which Isabel instinctively caught and held the poor hands, unconsciously breathing tender, broken words of sympathy and soothing.

When it was at last over the two women looked at each other in tears.

"And you had a little baby," whispered Katharine. "You loved it?"

"I hated it," said Isabel.

"Oh, you poor thing, you poor thing!"

"Don't." Isabel drew back. In a moment she had become strangely conscious of some hitherto untouched, unsunned deep within herself, across whose frozen calm she felt the first slight tremor of a vast and near convulsion. Fear took possession of her—fear of this new unknown, unsuspected self—and of that suffering, forgiving, victorious soul of Katharine, which looked at her from calm unconquered eyes—would it always follow her, looking at her from his eyes, looking at him even from hers? Ah, she could never bear it!

She rose with an impetuous gesture. "I must go. I have stayed too long. I am afraid I have tired you," she said, in a desperate effort to restore the conventional footing.

But when Regester hurried upstairs half an hour later he found Isabel still beside the bed, holding Katharine high with pillows, in a dis-

traction of pity over such pain as she had never witnessed before.

"Have you been here long?" he asked, after they had laid her gently back. He looked at her with bitterly hostile eyes.

"An hour. Perhaps longer," she answered, defiantly, while her hand tightened about Katharine's. She was on ground with his patient of which he knew nothing.

"Nothing could have been more cruel. For weeks her life has just depended on her being spared any excitement—any strain. She does not know that. She thinks this is a gradual decline. It is not. She will not recover from the shock you have given her." Regester had been speaking in the stillest voice; now, looking straight at Isabel, he added, "Had you no mercy? You have a great deal to answer for."

Then he left the room so abruptly that she had no chance to defend herself.

Her mood changed—she wrenched Katharine's clinging fingers apart from her own, and rose to go, and as she did so she had a vision of herself in the long mirror on the other side of the room. She stepped toward it, her pulses palpitating with avaricious recognition of her beauty. Ah! the air of this room choked her. Life—yes, it was love, but not the blanched coun-

terfeit of it to which that poor fool dying there on the bed had erected an altar in her dull breast. She caught up her wrap—she was now only eager to get away—but in that moment she heard a voice in the hall below which struck colour and life from her face and figure, and left her standing there helpless, despairing. Clifford!

She heard his nearing step, so light and quick, and she shrank back into the dullest corner of the room, conscious of nothing save the longing to shield herself from his sight.

Ah! now she would know and understand it all, and to-morrow?—to-morrow would be hers—and his; she could wait.

And then, watching with coveting eyes, she saw Mackemer come in—her husband—hers—his face set in sharp lines of pain, his eyes with a look in them that she knew she could never blot from her remembrance.

Ah, and then that long unbroken silence!

Was it short to them, those two, hand in hand once more—Katharine awaking from unconsciousness to find herself in this brief heaven of his nearness to her, of his touch, of a love which spoke to her in a language understood of none but themselves—and he, bending over her, straining to interpret each faintest change, each precious variation of expression in the beloved

face, so deeply shadowed by pain. Yet, like a hurt child, his cry to her was of himself, for his burden was heavier than he knew how to bear.

"Oh, Katharine, Katharine! tell me, what am I to do? It's all so dark to me. I see no light."

"I know. Yes, yes. But you must be good to her—to Isabel." She thought her visitor gone. "You must. It is the only way. But, Clifford, Clifford, never forget that I—that I—love you."

She was ill—dying, perhaps. That was what Maudsen had told him, and reckless, defiant of interdict, he leaned over and kissed her. A long silence, precious, intimate, revealing, followed.

And alone, in her place, shrank Isabel. She had never been so alone in her life. Katharine had forgotten her—her husband did not even know she was there.

Behind her, a door opened into the next room. It was ajar; she slipped noiselessly through it, and passed down the stairs, out into the street. She walked along rapidly, until she reached the station, where a train had just come in, which she boarded mechanically, to discover presently that she was going in the wrong direction. At the next stop she got out, and waited an hour for a city-bound train. She waited, unconscious of herself, unconscious of an emotion, yet acutely

pervious to the smallest detail about her—the names on the signs across the street, the child in a yellow frock staggering beneath the weight of a fat baby, the odd shape of one of a hundred small stones in the dusty roadway leading into the station, the faint perfume wafted from a silken-skirted woman rustling by.

At last the whistle of an approaching train startled her, and warned her that in her stupid preoccupation she had remained on the wrong side of the track. For a moment she hesitated, with a strange impression of fear. What was this curious haze cobwebbing her brain? What did people do when they were on the wrong side? Why, they crossed over.

The speed of the on-coming train spurred her forward—she did not realise that it was a through express until she reached the middle of the track upon which it was thundering toward her.

Then she wavered—and understood.

“Oh, God, let me die!” she cried, aloud. But the instinct of self-preservation was too strong. With a terrible effort she threw herself forward, and fell, dragging her body as far as she could. But not far enough. She felt the awful rush, the whirlwind breath of the wheels, and the train had passed on its bloody way, while she lay

there, calm, looking at that foot. Was it hers? It seemed to her that she had lain there for all eternity, just looking at it, when a rough man rushed forward and tore off his coat, to lay tenderly upon it.

"Oh, lady, lady! don't ye look at it. Don't ye, now."

What a kind dirty face he had!

"Will you please kill me," she said to him, gently. "Don't you see? That is my foot. How can I live with a foot like that?"

In an instant there was a crowd. Faces pressed upon her everywhere. Some man assumed authority; she gave him her address in a clear, even voice which sent a shudder through those who heard it.

"Damn it! Why don't she scream?" said a voice somewhere behind her.

"Take me home at once," she said. "No, I will not go to any hospital. I am not suffering. But I—want—to go—home." And then the agony of benumbed nerves suddenly reasserting themselves overcame her, and, mercifully, she lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XX

IT was the day after. Mackemer sat alone in Isabel's room, the room which had become the temple of a great silence, for she lay at rest there. He felt as if his world had dropped away from him, leaving him alone upon a cold mountain-peak, with the desolate mists of eternity limiting his sight. The fear, the horror of death encompassed him—death in such cruel, such bewildering, such tragic form as this.

He had not looked upon her still face. He could not. It was incredible that she, Isabel, should be lying there, silent, unbreathing, dead.

Was it only twenty-four hours ago that he had parted from her?—that she had called him back to say: "No, Clifford, that wasn't a pretty kiss. You must do better than that, dear."

An exclamation had risen to his lips, but under the menace of her narrow eyes, he obeyed, calling to his aid the grace so natural to him, so inevitably alluring to a woman.

He had left her, smiling, radiant.

And now, after a brief horror of agony, she lay here, shrouded in the silence of eternity.

"Isabel!" he cried. "Isabel!"

It seemed as if she must speak, so swift had her lips ever been to answer his.

But had she, whose life had been so fearfully involved with his, passed forever from him? Had Death, the great Purifier, wiped not all tears, but all stains from her soul? And was he, solitary, left to bear the burden of their sin?

The sense of loneliness crushed him.

But she had died alone, before he could reach her. The mangled foot had been but a minor part of her terrible injuries. What had she thought in those cruel moments of consciousness inflicted upon her, just as her life's last sun was setting?

"Isabel, poor Isabel!" he whispered. What was the meaning, what was the use of that mystery of sin in which they had sunk themselves? And what had their experience of life brought to them, that it had denied to their calmer, more law-respecting neighbours?

The question and its answer were too bitter for endurance.

She would soon lie out there, in the unending silence, beside that little spotless child, his and hers. The abounding life, which had recklessly

demanded the sacrifice of honour, of righteousness, for its adornment, had passed, like the wind which had stirred last summer's leaves, into that dread space which knows neither time nor name. His honour? His righteousness? What had they amounted to when the battle was upon him?

She had wrecked his life. Ay, that was ever the cry of the man, sitting amid the ruins of his character. Nay, he would be honest and ask, what had she, who had wrought so much that was ill, done for him of lasting good?

It was a great reckoning.

What mystery, what marvellous consecration of evil that to her he should owe his awakening—that through her there should have come to him the uplift, the slow, difficult perceiving of the beauty of holiness, of the unconquerable majesty of law in human life! Even unto her, it had been granted, though blind, to work as one with the divinity, ever shaping good out of evil.

There returned to him now the memory of a night of long ago, when she had sung to him, in her rich, sensuous contralto:

“Some day the silver cord will break,
And I no more, as now, shall sing——”

His eyes clouded with the first tears which had come to him. For he saw her again as she had been then, in all the pride of her conquest, dominant, defiant, securely self-assured, and yet upon her lips that solemn strain:

“ Some day my earthly house will fail,
I cannot tell how soon ’twill be——”

and again and again, the glad refrain:

“ And I shall see Him face to face,
And tell the story, Saved by grace!”

He looked toward the still figure, so straight under the white silken sheet. Her earthly house had failed her, but what of the spirit marching on, into what realm of shadow?

“Isabel!” he cried again, in bitter sorrow.
“Isabel!”

With her he had fallen into the awful abyss of sin, out of which he had staggered up the straight and narrow steeps of repentance toward the place whence he could look out and see the greatness, the wholeness, the splendour of the plan of life he had so wilfully transgressed. To him there had come the divine touch which had released the imprisoned vision.

And to Isabel?

Had all the best, the highest, that she had

known in life, just been her love for him? Had that been the terrible means of grace alone open to her, cruelly freighted as she was with the qualities which make so surely for the destruction of men? In the great reckoning, were her loyalty to him, her single devotion, not to be perhaps accounted unto her for righteousness?

He went over, and with trembling fingers drew down the covering, and looked at her.

Once he had deemed himself charged with her redemption. Looking now upon her quiet face, he understood otherwise. For it was for him that redemption from sin, from the love of it, had been wrought; but at what cost?

Softly, as if she were sleeping, he covered again the face upon which Death had set its mighty, immovable seal.

He had entreated deliverance from the agony, the shame of life with her. It had been granted to him. But so cruelly had it come, so great was the price, that it seemed but punishment beyond his strength to endure.

Deliverance! Ah, but the word haunted him.

Deliverance? It was not a thought for that silent room.

He went softly away. The familiar rooms looked curiously remote; in the library his big chair seemed waiting for some occupant un-

known to him. Already there were flowers everywhere; the heavy perfume sickened him; he grew faint, and throwing open the window, he leaned out, eager for the sweet, bud-scented freshness of the spring air.

Katharine! Ah, at last! unrebuked, her name welled up from the depths of his tortured heart.

Katharine! Katharine!

The sweet voices of children at play rose from the street—across the way the lilt of a love-song made gay carol from a young girl's heart—a mist of green breathed life upon the trees but yesterday bare-branched—the air blew soft with promise of bud and flower and fruit. "Katharine!" he cried, in his weariness and pain, "Katharine!"

And then once more, as if in swiftest answer to his call, his treasured memory of her envisioned itself in beatific radiance before him—his Katharine, loved and lost, but for the shimmering, mystical moment, humanly near to him, the breath of life sweet upon her waiting lips, the quenchless light of undying love in her tender, steadfast eyes.

CHAPTER XXI

IT'S no use. Kathie is a mystery to me," said Airlie, to her husband. "Now that I really understand all that was wrecked in her life, because I have you—" She looked at him with tender, lovely eyes. "No, I simply don't see how she can act as she does. To begin with, she was dying—of course she was—you said so, Dr. Maudsen said so, and then right in the midst of that, the moment, actually, the moment that she hears that dreadful Isabel is dead, why, she sets to and gets better. I don't understand anything any more. The whole thing is just a horrible, reckless jumble of tragedy. If that woman had never come into their lives, Katharine and her husband would have ended their days together in undisturbed peace and happiness."

"But you see, she came," said Regester, quietly. "Sweetheart, we have to take life as we get it. It's full of tragedies like this. And I think"—he paused—"I'm glad of it."

Airlie looked at him. What could that mean?

They were walking up the hill to the spot from which they so often watched the sunsets together. There was the quiver of coming storm in the restless air—sullen clouds crept darkly across the flaming west.

"Oh, Airlie," continued Regester—he caught her little hand in his, and looked at her, little Airlie, heedless child as she seemed at times, yet in that mysterious alchemy of marriage wherein soul is exchanged for soul, she was to become not only bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, but thought of his thought, another self, from whom he could no more be separated than from the self that he knew by his name. A new sense of the beauty of love flooded his heart; he hungered for the touch of her hand, for its warmth, for its littleness.

Tears sprang to the girl's eyes; she leaned her head against his strong arm, so glad of it, so strengthened by it, so rejoiced to feel that he was her refuge—that he was hers, that she was his, and that the whole world could never part them.

"Oh, Airlie, has it counted for nothing to you and to me, that we have been privileged to live so near to her life, to watch her self-renunciation day by day, to know that she sacrificed all that she had to sacrifice to her belief in the persistence of good? Child, the thought of her comes

to me always as an uplift. Is that a little thing? I think not." He was silent a moment; then he added, "My little wife, just what is worth living for, just *what* is worth dying for, is the problem that she set for her life to answer."

Airlie's eyes glowed. "I know, I know," she whispered.

"Do you think that she cares now for the bitterness of self-abnegation, the humiliation of love despised?" he went on, his voice touched with deepest feeling. "Do you think that in this Universe, where there is not a grain of dust but has its appointed place in the great balance, that the agony of her tears, the beauty of her struggle after righteousness, has lost all meaning, because, perchance, there may yet be happiness for her? And do you think, that knowing her husband as he is now, she would stop to count the cost of so great salvation?"

"Oh, I dare say!" cried Airlie, impetuously. "But was it fair that the best of her life should be sacrificed just to develop him? Had she no right of her own to happiness?"

"Ah, that's a great problem, sweetheart," said Regester. "You see, apparently, that terrible experience of sin which wrought such ruin for her was imperatively needed to bring out the highest good in Mackemer. So far as we can

see, nothing else would have done it. It is probably as you say, that but for the fearful crossing of another fate with his, he and Katharine would have lived out happy, contented lives on the level. But they would never have known the depths and the heights, the supreme anguish and the ecstasy that alone lift life into the divine realm of the spirit."

"But, dear, it was not his experience of sin that did that for them," protested Airlie.

"No, it was not," said Regester. "It was Katharine's noble interpretation of life, her acceptance of sorrow, her lofty forgiveness, that out of his sin wrought his redemption. I remember so well her saying to me once, in the first terrible days of their separation, that she would call to the good in him until he heard. I pitied her. But she called to him through days and years of pain. And at last, he heard. Dear, has her faith, her patience, her love, not reaped richest reward?"

"Oh, yes, I know all that," cried Airlie, rebellious. "But how can she ever trust him again? And she will, she will. I know it. But how can she?"

"Trust him!" echoed Regester. "Ah, the question is, how could she do anything else. I met Mackemer in La Salle Street yesterday. His face

—child, I haven't been able to keep it out of my thoughts since. And, dear, she hasn't seen him yet. It is six months since that poor woman died. When she does see him, and soon she must— Oh, Airlie! thank God, there won't be any evil force in the Universe strong enough to keep them apart. And yet, in a way, her return to him will be the greatest sacrifice she has yet made for him."

The chill night wind fretted the leaves still lingering upon the trees so lately glorious in crimson and gold; the sinking sun flared red defiance at the storm-clouds smothering the fair sky; then stealthily slipped behind the serrate lances of the lonely pines, and gray-garbed night, relentless, began her swift weaving of the spent day's shroud.

"Dearest, we must go," said Regester. "But kiss me first, and let us be glad that we have each other, that nothing can part us."

Airlie looked up at him, her sweet blue eyes strangely wistful.

"Then you don't want in our lives the depths and the heights, the anguish and the ecstasy, that you spoke of?"

"Oh, my darling, God forbid!" he said, quickly. "God forbid. We are not strong enough for that. Child, what a mystery it all

is! We covet so fiercely what we call happiness, yet when we analyse our conceptions of it, what do they amount to? They are all material. But pain—discipline! No, no, one cannot covet that. Yet from it alone springs all that is loftiest and most enduring in life."

He was silent a moment; then he repeated, softly:

"Is it true, O Christ in heaven,
That the strongest suffer most,
That the wisest wander farthest
And most helplessly are lost?
'That the mark of rank in nature
Is capacity for pain,
That the anguish of the singer
Makes the sweetness of the strain?"

THE END





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